**GAMES 2019**

All children, be they senior or junior, start training each year with the same chance of being on a team. Each season new children join games training and juniors move up to seniors. Other children move on to new ponies. Therefore there is no assumption that ANY child will be on a particular team at the start of a new year. Just because a child was regularly on the A team last year does not give them the automatic right to start on that team the next year. It is up to every individual to attend training regularly, try their hardest and compete for their place.

Decisions about team selection are discussed between, and made by all the trainers and Vicky Dungait. These decisions are taken with the full support of the DC and Pony Club Committee. When making these decisions a number of factors come in to play – particularly at senior level. These include –

How the pony and child work as part of the overall team. Are they good team members who get on with all other team members and are supportive towards them? Are they prepared to forgo their own best positions and races for the good of the team as a whole?

Can the pony and child do every race – as the competitions get more intense later in the season this becomes important? If a child hurts itself or a pony has to be pulled out it is important that the other 4 ponies and children if at all possible can be competitive in every race. It may be that you think your child offers more in some races than the members chosen but teams require all-rounders.

Can the child, if required, cope with and ride different ponies within the team in the event of a problem? And on this subject we need to consider whether the weight to height ratio for ponies and riders works so that we have most team members able to ride at least one other pony if required. Moreover, are the pony’s owner prepared to let their pony be ridden (under very supervised circumstances and only for the good of the team) by another child.

Whilst in an ideal world we would choose teams before the first Friendly competition and stick with them, in reality this is unlikely to happen. Circumstances, weather, injured children and lame ponies mean that there will inevitably be movement between teams. And because a child is picked on the A team for the first competition there is NO guarantee they will remain on it. Children improve at different rates, ponies may be good at the start of the season and then be overtaken by others. In an ideal world we would hope to take the Area qualifying team on to Zones, but if we find that other children or ponies improve more than the original line up, then there will still be changes right up to Zones. This is hard for parents and children, but these decisions are not taken lightly and not without considerable discussion and heart searching. The same would happen in any sports team a child participated in – be it netball, hockey, football or rugby.

Please be aware that ultimately we want our teams to do as well as they possibly can – that is the nature of competitive sport in any discipline. As such, if members of the A team fall by wayside through illness, injury to child or pony, then B team members will be moved up. Sometimes this breaks up a tight knit second team and causes resentment unfortunately. Ultimately though, most B team children will jump at the chance to move up, this is what they have been working for all year, even if it results in a B team being unable to compete or having to draft in novice or junior members to keep the team going.

With regard to children being available for training and competitions – we are always pleased if children are out and about competing in other disciplines – particularly for the Morpeth Hunt Pony Club. We will do our best to avoid clashes with training for eventing, dressage and show umping if at all possible and are aware this year that some Friendly competition dates do clash with Area qualifiers in other disciplines. That said these are Friendlies and it should be possible to avoid clashes with the Areas or Zones themselves. However, if children consistently attend other events, in any discipline, rather than Friendly weekends, particularly in the run up to qualifying competitions, they must be aware that they cannot be guaranteed to retain their place on a particular team. Their absence means moving up another member and if that child performs better or as well as the one they are standing in for, it is only fair to give them their chance. Moreover absences from training in the run up to competitions, or training on foot or on a different pony, disrupt team preparation badly – and cause resentment to build up amongst those who are attending regularly.

At the Morpeth PC we want every child to have fun doing games, to improve, to learn new skills and have the opportunity to compete if they are ready to do so. We will not send every child to every competition – some are a very long way away and some of a very high standard which would be off-putting for novice or very junior members. Weekends away cost a lot of money in terms of entries, diesel, food for both humans and ponies etc and whilst fun, are realistically more enjoyable when children do not feel overwhelmed and incapable of being reasonably competitive. That said if there are Assisted or Novice competitions that children are capable of doing and we can make up a team we will do our best to get them entered. If parents are happy doing so we will endeavour to join with other pony clubs to enter teams to allow children to compete in Friendlies.

Pony Club Games can provide your child with some of the best moments of their childhood – talk to ones who have left and they will tell you so! Witness the huge ground swell of support from old members from many years of games teams for our HOYS journey last year. Ultimately the more your child puts into PC Games the more they will get out of it. If you have any concerns, questions or worries please talk first to the trainer of your team – we are all more than happy to help in any way we can.