

IN THE LATEST IN OUR SERIES ON NORTH EAST SPORTS STARLETS WHO ENJOYED SUCCESS IN 2018, WE PROFILE GOLFER JESS BAKER

By **SAM BLACKLOCK**

A PROMISING Newcastle golfer rounded her summer off to a tee after successfully competing at the England Girls' Under-16 Championships.

Jess Baker, 16, who completed her GCSEs at the Westfield School in Gosforth in July, was in action at the prestigious competition at Lymé Regis.

Girls from across Europe took to the greens - Baker completing the tournament in tied second place.

The teenager was delighted with her success.

She said: "I really liked the course and we got to play in hot sunshine!"

"It is always good to challenge yourself by playing against other girls from across Europe and I felt I played solidly and was really pleased with the result."

On the back of her success in Dorset, Baker enjoyed a successful trip to Northern Ireland - contesting the Girls' Under-18 British Open Championships at Ardglass GC.

More than 140 competitors from 24 countries including India, Canada and South Africa battled it out for the honours.

Baker ended up in 42nd place, making the cut from the top 64 but losing out 2 and 1 to Hannah Darling from Scotland in the first round of the knockout competition.

She was also selected for the national under-18s girls' squad which comprises only eight players.

Baker was also part of the England under-16 squad which took on Ireland in October.

She and Whitley Bay's Rosie Belsham helped England defeat the Irish 15.5-8.5 over the par-72, 6,500-yard Limerick course.

They won their foursomes matches, partnering Daisy Kennedy and Cattlin Whitehead respectively and then, playing together, claimed their fourball match.

Both girls are Northumberland senior county players and members of the county's under-16 squad,



Jess Baker

Gosforth golfer Jess Baker who enjoyed a great year in 2018 and hopes for more success in 2019



A busy year for ace Baker goes with real swing

coached by J J Vallely from Matfen Hall GC.

Baker added: "It was a very busy summer playing in numerous events for club, county and country."

"There is a lot of travelling involved but I always have a lot of fun on the road with my family."

"I played in various national competitions in 2018 including the Helen Holm Scottish Ladies' Open at Royal Troon, where I was tied 13th out of 140 competitors."

"I also won my club championship at Gosforth Park Ladies GC, which was a great way to end the season."

Baker also figured among the honours at the Champions of Champions Event at Durham's Ramside Hall Golf Club - an elite event for club champions in Northumberland, County Durham, Tees-

side Yorkshire, Cumbria and the Scottish borders.

She won the event with two-under-par round of 72.

In 2017 the youngster was the winner of the Under-16s Midland Open Spring Championship, eighth in the Scottish Under-23 Ladies' Open and seventh in the North of England Under-16 Open Championship.

She also qualified for the British Junior Masters at Close House GC in Northumberland.

Baker now aims to keep progressing on the course in 2019.

She added: "I loved the experience of playing for England and I hope I will be involved in more games in the future."

"I am also hoping to gain a golf scholarship in the United States in two years time, where I will be able

to mix studying for a degree with playing collegiate golf, then we will see where that leads."

"I am keen on a career in golf. In the meantime, I just want to keep working hard at my game to become the best golfer I can."

Baker went on: "Golf is such a unique sport which sometimes has a negative perception."

"However, there is a huge push to get more people involved and that is great to see."

"I am an ambassador for the Girls Golf Rocks campaign to get young girls involved in the sport."

"We had an event at Close House over the summer where around 80 girls turned up. I thought that was really fantastic."

■ DON'T miss a special feature on South Moor golfer Chris Handy in Grassroots Sport soon.

Bowman on target early for Rockcliff

RUGBY UNION

ROCKCLIFF resumed their Durham and Northumberland Division Two campaign with a ruthlessly-efficient 45-14 victory against a combative Sedgefield.

Coaches Darren Cunningham and Craig Hamilton selected a team almost at full strength for a fixture many considered could go the way of the home team if Rockcliff showed any complacency on the pitch.

The Whitley Bay side started strongly and after two minutes Bowman had trundled across for his trademark try.

Playing on Sedgefield's small square pitch, sloping on four sides from an apex in the north west corner, the Red and Gold forwards found it tough going against the home side.

However, they soon worked out how to gain the upper hand and exerted all sorts of pressure on the opposition forwards.

Try two followed for the visitors as Pentland crossed in almost identical fashion to the first score, converted by Hansen.

Four minutes before the break Pentland crashed over the whitewash in a similar fashion to the previous tries, again converted by Hansen.

Ramage then smashed over for the fourth and bonus-point try after leaving a trail of destruction in the Sedgefield defence.

The versatile Donnelly replaced Webster just before the break and at half-time Rockcliff led by 24 unanswered points.

The second period started much as the first had, Bowman crossing the try line, converted by Hansen, before coach Cunningham brought in the changes in the pack - bringing on Moore and Thomson and resting Hamilton and Hall.

Another forward move saw Alex Hayton striding away, being caught, recycling the ball and then going over for a deserved try, converted by Hansen with the best kick of the day from out wide.

Thomson then trundled over, again converted by Hansen, to complete Rock's scoring.

Sedgefield started a fightback and, with Rockcliff reduced to 13 men when two players were sin-binned, scored two well-taken tries - both converted.

Rockcliff hold on to top spot ahead of North Shields and now look forward to successive home games against Ryton, Darlington and Bishop Auckland.