**Chris Pickard**

**(by Dan Lewis)**

Balancing sport with study is never an easy task, though as one Masters Degree student has shown, a bit of commitment and success can be achieved on both fronts.

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After picking up his first cap for the Welsh badminton team at the age of 15, it’s fair to say that Chris Pickard hasn’t looked back. Further caps for the senior side followed, to go alongside individual victories in the Junior National Championship and Senior National Championships – a competition he won in February this year after numerous near-attempts.

Though the Welsh U19 singles, doubles and mixed doubles champion had to make a tough choice between study and sport, opting to balance the two with a particular focus on his Masters Degree which is now coming to an end.

As victory earlier this year in the Senior Championship shows however, Pickard still has the hunger to succeed in the sport alongside his study.

"Winning the Senior Championship was great, especially because I wasn’t really expected to win it,” Pickard tells *GlamSport.*

“I just couldn’t seem to win it in the past. I won the Junior Championships for four years running, but always missed out when it came to senior level – until this year.

“Obviously there are players who are a lot older than me playing in the competition, so over time I built up my experience before finally winning the trophy which was a really good feeling.”

Pickard’s route into the sport was rather unusual, though it’s fair to say he has not looked back, despite his Masters Degree in computer forensics now taking immediate priority – an area he would love to one day work in.

“My cousin invited me to a local badminton club when I was younger and as I had nothing else to do I went along. I started going every week then before getting scouted for a county squad, and I then got better and better.

“I got into the Welsh squad when I was 15 and represented Wales from then on really, picking up my first senior cap when I was 19. I was junior national champions between the ages of 15 – 19, which was a great achievement.

“Badminton has taken a back seat of late as I’ve been focusing on my master’s degree, but once that is out of the way I would like to get back into the sport.

“I originally actually studied sports science at Cardiff Met, but it was too much of the same thing so by studying computer forensics it kept my study separate from badminton which meant it was fresher.

“I’ve put my studies first, but now that is coming to an end I can get back into training and get playing for Wales again.

“I love computer forensics and it is an area I would love to go into in the future, but of course I am also focused on the badminton side of things.”

Despite the individual accolades picked up over the years by Pickard, it has not been a season to remember for Glamorgan’s badminton side with a bottom placed finish.

Pickard puts this down to certain key players moving on, though he is keen to use his experience in the sport to push on fellow students in order to help Glam – now formally known as University of South Wales - climb up the tables in future seasons.

“Glamorgan haven’t done very well this year,” Pickard continued.

“It’s a shame really because a few years ago we were in the Premier Division, but a lot of the players left so this year we’ve been struggling, simply because we haven’t had the same number of players.

“I’ve been coaching players to help bring them on a bit, and I’m hoping to stay involved next year - as long as I have a job around here. I want to still have something to do with this project, because there are some players who can be really good.”

Using his experience to push on others in the sport is something that Pickard would like to do more of in the future, though right now he is focused on the playing side of things, with forensics very much still on his mind.

Picking up more caps for Wales upon the end of his Masters is Pickard’s key priority, with plans already in place to allow his transition back into the Welsh playing system.

“I really enjoy the coaching side of Badminton, but I need to get some more qualifications in that area really.

“Coaching is something I’ve always been involved with – I used to coach the disabled badminton team, so I do enjoy it, but at the moment I want to just focus on the playing side rather than the coaching.

“I left the Welsh squad because of university. I was having to do too much really, so that has meant I’ve been pretty much training by myself. I have however spoken to those who run the Welsh set-up and hopefully after the summer they can integrate me back into the system once all my work is out of the way.

“I’m focusing on completing my degree before eventually making my way back into the Welsh squad where I hope to win as many caps as I possibly can and represent Wales, before giving back to the sport through coaching.

“At the same time I would like to keep my career in forensics open, because it is something I really enjoy doing.”

Despite representing Wales in numerous ranked tournaments around the world, Pickard’s ranking has understandably fallen of late as his focus has moved towards his degree. Though he is hoping that with attention turning back to badminton after his studies, he can climb back up the rankings before challenging for a 2018 Commonwealth Games spot.

“I’m a bit too late for the Commonwealth Games as you have to be in the top 60 in the world to get picked so that’s pretty much out of the question now,” said a realistic Pickard.

“Because I’ve been focusing on university work I haven’t been going to the tournaments to pick my ranking up which is a shame – but I am certainly looking ahead to the next Commonwealth Games in five years time, that would be a special achievement.”

A special achievement it certainly would be; Pickard has the highly regarded tournament right in his sights – this time it will have his full attention with his studies almost out of the way.