

Richard Shellam Press Pack

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A promising young squash player is aiming to turn professional after receiving sponsorship from local web design business Kino Creative.

Richard Shellam, of Gosforth, Newcastle, won the North of England Junior county closed under 19 competition aged 16, 17, and is aiming to take the title for a third year running.

The 18-year-old has begun a programme of intensive training to prepare for the challenge.

He has been sponsored to play alongside squash pros in Pontefract, near Leeds, to help raise his game - with the long term aim of competing for international honours early next year. The young athlete, who is this week celebrating winning a place at Birmingham University to study geology, is pushing for a place in the British top ten.

He said: "I'm hoping this is going to be a big year for my squash career.

"I'm in the process of joining the British Squash Professionals Association (BSPA) for more tournaments and to play higher level players, and have been training very hard to build myself up for the new season.

"The training in Pontefract has been challenging; I've been doing group sessions with some of the top pros in the world.

"It's helped get me in shape for the North of England junior championship, which begins in September.

"I won it last year and the year before that, so I'm hoping to make it three in a row this time round.

"Then if all goes I'll well playing Canadian and U.S. opens in Toronto and Hartford, near New York.

"Last year, I was ranked in the mid 30's in the under 19s nationally; but it was my off year so I was not expecting too much from it and will improve. My aim is to break into the top 10 in the UK."

"Winning the u19 county closed for the third time in a row would be a good way to start."

As well as his success at u19 level, Richard reached the semi-finals of the North of England senior county closed, and has won the Worcestershire Junior Open, and the Junior County Closed at u15 and u17 levels.

His former coach at The Northumberland Club in Jesmond, Jim Douglas, said: "Richard is the best junior player in the area.

"This is going to be a very exciting, and challenging year for him. He's welcome to train back here whenever he wants!"

His sponsor, IT entrepreneur Seth Ridley, is providing the funding Richard requires to take his game to the next level.

Mr Ridley, 34, who is managing director of Newcastle-based web design company Kino Creative, said: "Kino paid for Richard to improve his game in Pontefract, and go pro later on in the year. It's fantastic that such talent is coming out of the North East, and I can't wait for Richard to make it on the pro circuit."

"He's an exciting young player with a great future who I'm sure we're going to hear a lot more of."