**Annual Report**

Dear Members, 18 October 2022, updated 25 January 2023

*We were originally supposed to hold our AGM in October, as usual, but some illnesses in key people, which all coincided at the worst possible time, led me to postpone the AGM until January. This report therefore covers the Academy Year Sep 21-Aug 22, with some additional parts to cover the last few months.*

2022 has been, and will continue to be, a challenging year. If we take our expansion into from April 2021 as “year 1” of our new project, then we are now firmly into year 2, which is when the pressure really starts to bite.

We knew from our financial modelling that years 2 and 3 of the expansion project were going to be the hardest, when the initial input of money from British Gymnastics has been used up, and we have to stand on our own two feet. This has indeed proved to be the case in no uncertain terms. As if taking on a £40,000 loan wasn’t hard enough, we had the Russian invasion of Ukraine forcing up energy prices and creating a general cost of living crisis throughout the UK. Like many businesses, we have felt that crisis, and for a while this year it felt like we would not survive.

Your team of volunteers and Directors have been working ridiculously long hours, on top of their day-jobs, to make this club work. I am pleased to say, it is working. After a difficult patch in the middle of 2022, we can see the green shoots appearing, but there is a very long way to go. Your patience and understanding are appreciated as we put maximum effort into growing our club. We will recover from COVID and the crisis of 2022, and we will bounce back, provided we all pull together as one team.

**Gymnastics Activity**

Away from the business challenges, it is a pleasure to be able to reflect on some gymnastics success.

After the previous year’s reset from COVID, we entered the Academy Year on a good basis. It is not possible to list all the gymnastics successes here, although it would be remiss not to mention three partnerships who qualified for the national finals in Stoke on Trent last May. The two women’s groups – Beth, Brooke and Millie, and Tilly, Catherine and Cleo – performed very well in their grades against some strong competition, while the Grade 1 Men’s Pair – Jamie and Logan – came away as national champions. They even featured on ITV, when they came to interview us about our expansion plans and the reporter discovered that gold medals were much more interesting than talking to me about business expansion!!

However, it is always vitally important to remember that success is not always about competing at high level, or finishing on the podium. For some people, the act of going onto the competition floor, in front of an audience and a panel of stern-looking judges, is an achievement in itself. I am equally proud of these individuals for overcoming their fears, working as a team and having the courage to compete, as I am of those who regularly leave a competition with a medal. They are all equally impressive and equally important to the Academy.

In April we hosted the very first Spirit Acro Crown Cup – our own major competition. It is no exaggeration to say this was an absolute triumph. Although one or two aspects let us down (eg the scoring system – we will sort that out for next year), overall it was a spectacular example of what can be achieved as a team. Everyone pulled together and we produced a fantastic example of a club-run competition, which put many other, more established competitions, to shame. We received many compliments about the whole weekend, and we are looking forward to repeating it next April.

*Jan 23*: I am very pleased to report that we have grown significantly in the last few months. In September we reintroduced pre-school lessons, with Bex Stuckey taking these over. After a slow start, word has got round and as of January 2023, we are almost full and considering adding more lessons. Not only does this provide a great activity for under-4s (nearly 50 of them each week), but also it helps to get people interested in the sport and the Academy from a very early stage. Many of our pre-schoolers from last year have since joined Foundation classes, and this progression is important for the long-term prosperity of the Academy. We have also welcomed about 40 new joiners in January. As part of our diversification plans, we have also started Cheerleading, we plan to restart Adult gymnastics in March, and we are in talks with two coaches to introduce tumbling and reintroduce FreeG later this year. By the end of 2023, we aim to offer a range of gymnastics activities so that there really is “something for everyone” at Spirit.

**Our Finances**

Money has been tight in 2021/22, and in the summer we were walking on a tightrope. This was primarily because there had been a larger than normal member outflow in May/June 2022 for a variety of reasons, which hit us hard at a very difficult time. Finances began to stabilise around October and as of January 2023 we are slightly more comfortable (although by no means out of the woods yet). Foundation fees will be reviewed around April as usual, and Squad fees will be reviewed around September. Any increase to fees will be made only if absolutely necessary, and by the smallest amount possible. However, we cannot absorb increasing costs indefinitely, so an increase is unfortunately inevitable and members should be prepared for it.

The Finance Director can expand on this topic during the AGM, but you can be assured that we remain faithful to the principles of a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, and a Community Amateur Sports Club.

**Long term plans**

Our long-term plan is to create a self-sustaining, debt-free club that will serve its members for many more years. There is some hard work still to do before we can claim to have achieved that, which your team of Directors and support volunteers will lead. If anyone wishes to help, especially if you have specialist skills relevant to running a small business, please make yourself known to a Director. If you would like to discuss the business strategy, please contact me using the details in the member pack.

**Summary**

2022 has been one of the most challenging years in the club’s 20-year history. We have got through it and come out stronger for the experience, and back on the road to growth. I am determined that all the effort put into Spirit over the last 5 years (and before) will not go to waste, and we will achieve our long term goals. Thank you all for your contributions, whether large or small, paid or voluntary, doing the sport or doing the admin. We could not succeed without Team Spirit.

Yours as ever,

Al Haigh

Managing Director