

E **DINBURGH Monarchs Academy team manager Scott Wilson believes the pathway for young British riders' development requires protecting – as doubt has been cast over the future of the National Development League.**

The withdrawal of the likes of Berwick and Workington from the NDL has fuelled rumours of the league ceasing to exist, with the Comets moving up and question marks also over the other stand-alone clubs.

Wilson, who is also team manager of the Northern Junior League champions West Lothian Wildcats, believes something must be done to allow young riders to progress.

He said: "If the NDL does cease to exist then it must be replaced by some sort of development league which is easier for riders to break into and is cheaper for clubs to run.

"I also feel every club should be encouraged to have some sort of involvement in a third tier or a junior league because ultimately, every club benefits from more riders coming through, so every club should play a part in developing those riders of the future.

"I know some other clubs are now making moves to replicate what we have done at Edinburgh with our youth academy and our training track, which is a good thing for British Speedway.

"The more clubs who can provide opportunities for youngsters to race and learn, the better."

Wilson also believes the current format of the National Development League has perhaps become too strong, and feels a shake-up of that format would further the development of riders who are just getting started in the sport.

He said: "I think the NDL has almost become too strong and too professional now.

"There are riders at the top end of the league who really shouldn't be in it, and I mean that in terms of quality, not age or anything else.

"The league needs to be de-strengthened for 2024 in my opinion. You look at the top three we assembled this season, and we had to do that to stay competitive and try to encourage fans to come along and watch a team that would be exciting and competitive in the division.

"But it makes the team expensive and the income through the turnstiles didn't necessarily cover a team that strong, and I know this was a problem felt by most clubs in 2023. The crowds simply weren't there to support the cost of running an NDL side at the standard it has reached.

"You look at someone like Mark Parker for instance, who is very new to speedway but

UNCERTAIN DEVELOPMENT

British speedway's third tier is under threat, and Monarchs Academy boss Scott Wilson is calling for aspiring riders to be protected...

making good progress.

"He should be able to come in as an NDL reserve and be racing in Heat 2 against riders of a similar standard but instead, in some races, he is sitting at the tapes with riders who race in the Premiership, and that's not right.

"There is a shortage of riders in the UK but the problem is that their route into the development league is being blocked because the NDL is too strong, so they can't get a team place as clubs know they will struggle to compete.

"If the league was a little weaker than it currently is, the costs to clubs would reduce and more clubs might have been willing to carry on into 2024 – whether it is now too late to save the NDL for 2024 I don't know, but I believe this would be the way to do it."

Wilson says that whatever the future holds for the National Development League, the goal for Monarchs Speedway Academy remains the same as they attempt to bring new riders into the sport who can hopefully move on to represent the club at a senior level.

He said: "Quite simply, British Speedway cannot lose its development tier. The Championship is a high level and young riders cannot be expected to jump from amateur and second half racing straight into the Championship league.

"There has to be a stepping stone league where riders can race against other riders who are better than them and gradually work their way up that division until they are ready to take the next step up into professional racing.

"If that stepping stone doesn't exist, the production line will grind to a halt and then where will we be in five years' time?"

"In 2024 we will continue to run our Saturday afternoon training sessions with our Academy pupils, with these sessions focused on 125cc and below, on our training track and where possible, it would be good to see our coaches work with the kids on the main Armadale circuit to develop their technique there, as well as continuing to hone specific skills which can be learned and practiced better on the smaller training track.

"It would be a dream to one day track an Edinburgh Monarchs side filled entirely by home grown Academy products and that has to be the ultimate goal.

"That day is still some years away however, as most of the kids in the Monarchs Speedway Academy are still very young and at the moment our primary focus for these young riders is to see them continue to progress and continue to enjoy their speedway journey."

Interest in the Monarchs Speedway Academy has been high, and that is something Wilson is keen to build upon, as well as perhaps encouraging riders from other motorcycle disciplines to have a go on the shale.

He added: "Our roster of Monarchs Speedway Academy pupils currently stands at 19 I believe, with all but four of them being new starters in 2023.

"We have also had two female riders competing for our NJL teams this year which is great, and I'm proud to be part of a club that is supporting women in speedway.

"We also have Mark Parker and Lee Harrison who have shown tremendous development this season on the 500ccs, and we will be making every effort to provide them with track time, and hopefully competitive track time at that, in an organised league.

"Motocross is a discipline which has served speedway well with the likes of Dan Bewley, Craig Cook and the Worralls converting from motocross, and this is something I have my eye on in Scotland.

"I have one or two connections in the Scottish motocross scene, and I will also be exploring this as a possible talent source for sure."



• Edinburgh Monarchs Academy trio Max Clegg, Scott Wilson and Ashton Boughen.

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