

**FIVES:** Birmingham school team preparing to take on the best in Britain

# Girls prove handy at historic sport

By Lisa Smith

**HISTORY** has always been high on the syllabus for young women at a top Birmingham school.

But now sixth-formers at King Edwards High School for Girls are about to make a little of piece of their own by breaking into a sport which has, for centuries, been very much the preserve of boys.

Eton Fives is a little-known sport that has been played since the 1800s and in Birmingham by boys at King Edwards since the first courts were built on campus in the 1940s.

The sport – a type of squash which is played on a court but with the hand rather than a racquet – was first invented at Britain's top public school for boys, Eton, but has now been introduced at KEHS to girls in the sixth form.

And although the girls have only been playing since September, they have already qualified for the National Schools Championships, which will be played in March where it all began: at Eton.

The King Edwards' girls are the first from the Midlands to reach the finals; currently, around 20 play the sport regularly alongside more traditional girls' games such as hockey, netball and tennis.

Fives is played with the palm of a gloved hand and uses a small, hard ball. It dates back to mediaeval times but was formalised in the 1870s by boys playing between the buttresses at the base of the steps leading up to Eton College Chapel.

Players usually play in doubles with all four throwing themselves around the court in an effort to return the ball by hitting the wall above a sloping ledge five feet above the ground.

The girls are currently training hard for the finals under the watchful eye of coach Mark Yates. Madeline Grant, 16, who will partner



The King Edward VI High School for Girls Eton Fives squad get in some practice ahead of the National Schools Championships.

Susanna Quirke as the school's first pair in the national championships, said: "It's a great game and very different from other sports.

"Our coach Mark is superb at explaining the complex tactics to the game as with four of you on

court, it gets pretty fast and furious. It helps to have played racket games like tennis and squash, as most of us have.

"You need to be quite agile as there are so many different angles and ledges that the ball can bounce off

and you need to change direction quickly to be able to scoop the ball up when it drops in a corner.

"It's definitely worth the aching hands, however, and we're really excited to get the chance to play at Eton where the game began."