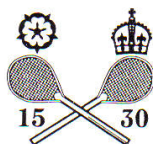


THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT

Hampton Court Palace



CHRIS CHAPMAN AND BEN MATTHEWS DRAW
THE CROWDS TO RTC...

More on page 5

...AND PHIL DUNN HAS MANY REASONS TO SMILE

Find him on pages 3, 4 and 5

The Winter Newsletter 2011/12
Number ninety-eight

chairman's chat

On behalf of the board I must begin by sending season's greetings to all our members and wishing everyone a happy and healthy New Year.

Following our plea in the last newsletter, we had a tremendous response to the Dedanists' National League match versus Queen's in November, which was a sell-out! We were also delighted to see more than 150 members and guests at the annual carol service in the Chapel Royal, many of whom stayed on afterwards for mince pies and mulled wine on court.

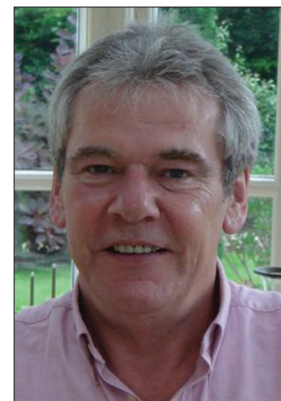
There are several forthcoming tennis events to bring to members' attention. First up is the RTC/Holyport National League fixture versus MCC here at RTC on Saturday 28 January. This is a great opportunity to spend a winter evening in the warmth of the Palace, enjoy a champagne supper and perhaps introduce some guests to top-class tennis. Also, following their triumph at Oxford (more of which on page 3), the RTC team have yet another away draw, against Queen's on Sunday 19 February, in the semi-final of the Pol Roger Trophy. It really would be good if we could turn out in force that day and turn it into a virtual "home" fixture. And finally, Ben Matthews has qualified for the World Championship eliminators and will take on Bryn Sayers at Prested Hall on 8 February before a return fixture at Queen's the following week.

On the social theme, I mentioned last time that the board and professionals are again organising a

formal club dinner to enable members and their guests to meet socially and, most importantly, to celebrate playing success at the club. We are pleased to confirm that this will be held on Saturday 24 March at Hampton Court Palace Golf Club, at 7pm. Tickets will be £47.50 (the same as last year), to include an awards ceremony, a three-course dinner and a selection of wine and soft drinks. Dress will be black tie. We hope members will support this event with the same enthusiasm as last year and tickets are on sale from the professionals, so please get your applications in as soon as you can.

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to mention two bits of housekeeping regarding court cancellations and prompt payment. Firstly, we all appreciate that there are times when late cancellations can't be avoided, but we do ask that every effort is taken to avoid this happening. Perhaps not everyone appreciates the time and trouble taken by the professional team to find stand-ins at short notice, but we ask that when penalties are incurred they are paid as soon as possible. Secondly, I would gently remind members that payment for courts is expected on the day of play, or on the next visit if no professional is on duty.

Paddy Sweetnam



DATES FOR THE DIARY

National League Premier Division

☛ This season Nick Wood and Peter Wright are representing both RTC and Holyport in the National League. Their first home match at Hampton Court is on **Saturday 28 January** against MCC, meaning another chance for us all to enjoy top-class tennis along with Pol Roger and dinner.

World Championship eliminators

☛ Congratulations to Ben Matthews (see page 5) on reaching the World Championship eliminators. He faces Bryn Sayers in a five-set match at Prested Hall on **Wednesday 8 February** and a week later at Queen's. The winner will take on Steve Virgona at Seacourt in the final eliminator.

Pol Roger Trophy

☛ The RTC team has a semi-final at Queen's on **Sunday 19 February** in the competition that has superseded the Field Trophy (see page 3). Why not go along and support our top amateur players? Then RTC will host the final on **Sunday 11 March** – perhaps with our own team in action...

Club Dinner

☛ As Paddy Sweetnam mentions above, the club will be recognising playing success and giving members a chance to socialise together on **Saturday 24 March** at Hampton Court Palace Golf Club.

COMING UP

RTC

21-22 Jan: Harris Watson Trophy
28 Jan: NL: RTC/Holyport v MCC
12 Feb: RTC v Manchester (social)
25-26 Feb: Barker Camm Cup Grade B
3-4 Mar: Harris Watson Trophy (cont.)
11 Mar: Pol Roger Trophy final
15-18 Mar: LRTA Masters
24 Mar: Club Dinner
31 Mar: NL: RTC/Holyport v Cambridge

ELSEWHERE

19-26 Jan: US Open (New York)
20-22 Jan: Henry Leaf Cup (MURTC)
27-29 Jan: Leamington handicap
2 Feb: NL: Cambridge v RTC/Holyport
5 Feb: NL: MCC v RTC/Holyport
3-5 Feb: Billy Ross Skinner (Hatfield)
8 Feb: World Champs: Ben Matthews v Bryn Sayers (Prested)
15/17 Feb: Bryn Sayers v Ben Matthews (Queen's)
19 Feb: Pol Roger Trophy semi-final – Queen's v RTC
24-25 Feb: Varsity Match (Lord's)
25 Feb-5 Mar: National Amateur Championships (Queen's)

RTC give Oxford the blues

Our top amateurs dug deep for away success in the Pol Roger Trophy quarter-finals

RTC enjoyed a successful debut in the new Pol Roger Trophy in December, adapting to the smaller court at Oxford adroitly enough to claim a 3-2 victory and to advance to the semi-finals.

The Pol Roger Trophy has effectively replaced the Field Trophy – the prestigious inter-club tournament for the country's best amateur players – although the Field Trophy continues as a second division, with some promotion and relegation each year.

As 2010/11 semi-finalists, the RTC team were seeded to progress at Oxford, and initially the match-up looked good for them on paper... at least, it did until our No 1, Peter Wright (3 handicap), was forced to withdraw with illness. After a hasty reshuffle of the singles and doubles order, captain Simon Barker, who had originally left himself out, was back in and was first up, in the second-string doubles with Sam Halliday...

No 2 doubles

Sam was an interesting choice, but as a tall left-hander who has just spent three years at Oxford University and thus knows the court extremely well, selecting him for doubles duty seemed logical. And so it proved, as he excelled at the net and galleries while his skipper patrolled the back. The young opposition of Johnny Beale and Miles Jackson had no answer, and as expected it was the visitors who took the first of the five rubbers, 6-1 6-4.

No 1 singles

The next match on court was between Roman Krznaric, author of *The First Beautiful Game* and a former National League Premier Division winner, and Robert Hird, whose development has been hindered in the past two years by serious injury. Robert was the underdog in this encounter, and when the Oxford man got to set point at 5-3 all seemed to be going to plan for him. Robert dug in, though, and after poaching that ninth game he then found himself heading to the hazard end at 5-5 and 30-0 up. He then forced two errors from Roman and the set was RTC's – a real smash 'n' grab.

The momentum continued into the second set, and at 4-2 Robert was two



RTC singles No 1 Robert Hird

games away from a fine win. However, Roman emerged from his 30-minute slump to produce the best tennis of the day, and within a few minutes he had snatched the second set 6-4 and taken control of the third. By the time it was 4-0, the writing was on the wall.

No one told Robert that, however, and after riding out that storm he clawed his way back to 3-4, then saved three match points at 3-5 before making it 4-5. The home team was getting restless, while the visiting support in the decidedly chilly dedans – including Lesley Ronaldson and Nick Wood – were sensing a sensational comeback. But it was not to be, as Roman closed the match out 6-4. A fine effort from Robert, though, and after so long away from competitive action he can take heart from this match.

No 2 singles

The second singles pitted home captain Rob Walker against the RTC club champion, David Watson. The key shot in this was the left-handed Oxford man's serve, as the Merton Street court offers considerable reward to a well-placed railroad. David never quite got to grips with the Walker serve and went down 6-4 6-3, leaving the home team 2-1 up overall and needing just one more rubber.

No 3 singles

RTC, however, were favourites to win the final two matches. In the third singles James Watson had a slightly better handicap than his young opponent, James Bates, but on paper it looked close enough to be a nervy affair. And that's exactly what we got.

The first set was tight, with our man ahead early on before being pegged

back. At 4-5 James W faced a set point against him, but he saved it valiantly and then took the set 6-5. Crisis averted for now.

The second set began in similar vein, with both players using their railroads to dominate when at the service end. James W's volleying was getting more consistent as the match wore on, though, and from 3-3 he put in a strong run of games to close out the match 6-3 and level the tie. It wasn't the best he'll ever play, but it was a gritty win when his team needed it most.

No 1 doubles

So, despite the dramatic 6-5 sets and close-fought battles all day, every match had so far gone roughly according to the form book. This boded well for RTC, whose first-string doubles pairing of James Sohl and Phil Dunn were warm favourites to take care of the improving Oxford University captain Simon Roach and Anthony Clake, his ruddy-cheeked predecessor.

All was going according to plan at first, as our boys pulled 5-2 ahead, with James's weight of shot surprising and unsettling the home pair. A rocky patch followed, but at 5-4 James and Phil steadied the ship and closed the set out with a game to 15.

Despite some fine retrieving from Simon, RTC again opened up a lead in the second set, but they were again hauled back, this time from 3-1 to 3-3. Once again, though, James and Phil were not to be denied, and they edged away with three straight games to clinch the match.

A long day, then, and a tight victory – the reward for which is another away tie, this time at Queen's on 19 February. The return of Peter Wright will give Simon Barker a welcome selection headache, with Tom Freeman and Karen Hird also available to push those who played at Oxford for their places.

Simon Edmond

POL ROGER TROPHY SEMI-FINAL DRAW

*MCC v Petworth
Queen's v RTC*

(To be played on Sunday 19 February)

National League mid-term report

It is a busy season for RTC in the National League, with teams active in every division from 2 down to 8 as well as Nick Wood and Peter Wright (in tandem with Holyport) in the Premier Division.

Nick and Peter have barely begun their campaign yet, but elsewhere the hard-hitting David Woodman has been flying for Cambridge/Newmarket and Bryn Sayers has been inspirational for Queen's. The Dedanists, in the form of our own Ben Matthews and Chris Chapman, are also in the thick of things at the halfway stage.

In Division 2, David Watson and Simon Barker are perennial contenders, and so far they look likely to be in the shake-up again. Their season's highlight so far is a fine win at Canford.

Division 3 is facing a fixture backlog, but MCC and RTC have established

themselves at the top, with James Sohl and Tom Freeman unbeaten for RTC. Division 4 (20-25) is going well, with the club sitting at the summit. They came unstuck on the Lilliputian Oxford court, but they will have a chance to make amends in the reverse fixture.

The Division 5 team have suffered a series of heartbreaking 6-5 third-set defeats – two of them in one evening at Oxford – but there is still life in a tight league. Division 6 (30-35) looks already like a battle between RTC and a strong Middlesex team, while the club's Division 7 team, featuring an unbeaten Anthony Wolfe, is again in contention, with no dominant team emerging yet.

Division 8 (40-45) has plenty of improving players pushing their way into the thirties and is thus very competitive – but luckily we have our own in the unbeaten Dick Cowling.

Competitions roundup

Tradition dictates that as the new season of club competitions begins, the previous season's **Seal Salver** is still some way from being settled. And so it was again – but eventually the 2009/10 finalists, Bernard Weatherill and Patrick Jenkins, made it a rematch in the 2010/11 final. Congratulations to Bernard, who was pushed hard but prevailed 9-6 to claim a third consecutive Seal Salver.

Long before that, Oli Watson had made it a bright start to the season for RTC, winning the **Chetwood Trophy**, the event for all UK clubs' handicap singles champions. The rapid descent of Oli's handicap doesn't appear to have harmed his success rate yet.

Phil Dunn and Owen Saunders achieved more national success, with Phil winning the **Category C Open Championship** for 20-24 handicaps, at Moreton Morrell, and Owen triumphing in the 35-39 division of **Category D** at Hatfield.

Alan Dallamore and Sarah Parsons were the duo who adapted best to the quirks of the **de Laszlo Bowl**, the

club doubles event in which neither player may cross the centre line. An 8-4 win over Helen-Frances Pilkington and Terry Marsh in the final capped a successful weekend.

The **Barker Camm Cup** continues, with Sarah Parsons again to the fore. Both she and Robin Mulcahy had advanced to the Grade E (50-59 handicap) final with crushing semi-final wins, but Robin ran out of answers in the final, which Sarah won 6-2 6-4. In Grade D (40-49), top seed Dick Cowling edged a thriller with Martin Daly in his semi, 3-6 6-5 6-5, while Paul Newton had to work equally hard to defeat the improving Elvira Campione 6-5 2-6 6-4. The final is yet to be played.

It's early days in the **Lathom Browne Cup**, but we do have one grade winner, and a dangerous one at that. John Mather took Grade H off 68, his last two scores being 9-0 and 9-3. At the time of writing he was already down to 60, and his Lathom Browne handicap will be updated before the quarter-finals take place.

NATIONAL LEAGUE TABLES

PREMIER DIVISION

| | P | W | Pts |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Cambridge/Newmarket | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| Dedanists | 5 | 2 | 17 |
| Queen's | 3 | 2 | 13 |
| Holyport/RTC | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| MCC | 1 | 0 | 0 |

DIVISION 2

| | | | |
|------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Cambridge | 4 | 4 | 16 |
| RTC | 4 | 2 | 14 |
| Canford | 3 | 2 | 12 |
| Hatfield | 4 | 3 | 11 |
| Queen's | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| Holyport | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| Radley | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| MCC | 4 | 0 | 6 |

DIVISION 3

| | | | |
|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| MCC | 3 | 3 | 19 |
| RTC | 3 | 2 | 16 |
| Prested Hall | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Queen's | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Moreton Morell | 4 | 0 | 4 |

DIVISION 4

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| RTC | 4 | 3 | 21 |
| Oxford | 3 | 3 | 17 |
| Moreton Morrell | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| MURTC | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| Canford | 2 | 0 | 2 |

DIVISION 5

| | | | |
|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Oxford | 4 | 3 | 17 |
| Canford | 4 | 3 | 17 |
| Hatfield | 4 | 2 | 16 |
| Cambridge | 4 | 1 | 11 |
| RTC | 4 | 1 | 9 |

DIVISION 6

| | | | |
|------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| MURTC | 3 | 3 | 19 |
| RTC | 3 | 2 | 16 |
| Holyport | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| MCC | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| Newmarket | 3 | 1 | 7 |
| Cambridge | 2 | 1 | 5 |

DIVISION 7

| | | | |
|------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Petworth | 4 | 2 | 16 |
| Oxford | 3 | 2 | 14 |
| RTC | 3 | 2 | 12 |
| Hardwick | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| Oratory | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Prested | 1 | 0 | 2 |

DIVISION 8

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Oxford | 4 | 4 | 22 |
| Moreton Morrell | 4 | 3 | 17 |
| Holyport | 4 | 3 | 17 |
| RTC | 4 | 3 | 17 |
| Newmarket | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| MURTC | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| Canford | 4 | 0 | 8 |
| Hatfield | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| Prested Hall | 2 | 0 | 4 |

CORINTHIAN CUP (Cambridge/Newmarket/Hatfield, 28 July-11 August)

There may just still be time for you to join RTC's team(s) for this Boomerang Cup-style team handicap doubles tournament. For more information, go to www.corinthiancup.com or contact Owen Saunders (osaunders@hotmail.com).

Booth/Sayers defy soothsayers

Local oracles predicting a National League win for RTC's pros were proved wrong

The Premier Division of the National League underwent a makeover last summer, and once the bandages had been unwrapped the new look was unrecognisable from the format of previous seasons.

Instead of each player taking on his opposite number over three sets, with a one-set-to-eight doubles match rounding off the evening, now each player takes on both opponents in quick-fire first-to-eight matches – and if there happens to be a handicap difference of 4.6 or greater, they now play off half the real odds rather than off level. The doubles, meanwhile, consists of a confusing three first-to-four-game sets, always off level.

Another significant change is in the team line-ups. Nick Wood plays again with Peter Wright, but they're now a combined RTC/Holyport team, while Ben Matthews and Chris Chapman have paired up to form a roving Dedanists team. Naturally, these two chose to host one of their home matches at Hampton Court – and so it was that a bumper crowd came along in November to support them against Queen's, represented by Bryn Sayers and Kieron Booth.

Ben and Chris had in fact played the reverse fixture at Queen's only two days earlier, succumbing 3-2 as Bryn won all three of his matches. Somehow they had to find a way to get



Bryn Sayers, as balanced as ever

the better of the world No 4 here, then.

First on court, however, were Chris and Kieron, in a battle of hard-hitting Victorians (in a geographical sense rather than a historic one, that is). Neither player was at his best – they would both produce better tennis just days later back at Queen's in a British Open encounter – but it was Kieron who edged a very tight set in the end, 8-7. First blood to Queen's.

Ben had run Bryn close in an IRTPA Championship semi-final at Manchester but had not troubled him in their National League match at Queen's. How would he fare on home ground? Unfortunately for Ben, Bryn was having one of those nights when he could do little wrong, and the consistency of his

play was relentless. With few openings to pounce on, Ben made some uncharacteristic errors on his way to an 8-2 loss.

The doubles started more brightly, with Chris in particular slipping into a groove and blasting the ball towards the dedans at a fierce pace. The first mini-set went the Dedanists' way 4-1, but the Queen's pair replied to take the second by the same score. In the decider Ben and Chris pulled out to 3-0, but just as it looked as if they were back in the tie Bryn stepped up a gear and pulled them back, game by game. Four games later Queen's had won their third rubber of the night and sealed the match.

In the reverse singles Chris received a small handicap allowance from Bryn but it was not quite enough, the Queen's man winning 8-5. Ben's victory in the final singles set was too little, too late for the Dedanists.

Still, it was a good warm-up for the British Open for all the players, not to mention an entertaining evening for the spectators. Midway through the evening Ben oversaw a light-hearted grille-hitting competition from deep at the service end, with accomplished players and total novices all having a crack. After five people had hit the grille once from their three attempts, the playoff saw Phil Dunn repeat the feat, claiming a bottle of Mirabeau rosé in the process. Easy game...

Ben Matthews set for world title race

As you read this newsletter, Ben Matthews will be continuing his training for his first World Championship eliminator, against Bryn Sayers at Prested Hall on 8 February.

Ben earned his shot by amassing enough ranking points to clinch the final place ahead of US-based luminaries James Stout and Tim Chisholm. Originally he was set to face world No 2 Steve Virgona, but the withdrawal of No 3 Camden Riviere with a wrist injury now means Steve advances straight to the final eliminator at Seacourt.

There he will face either Ben or Bryn Sayers over 13 sets – but first the two

Britons must play out home-and-away five-set matches. The pair know each other's games extremely well, and Sayers has generally had the upper hand, but they have had some very tight tussles, not least in the semi-finals of the IRTPA Championships in October (which you can watch online at realtennis.tv).

That Manchester tournament was won by Virgona, in straight sets over Sayers. However, Sayers gained revenge in a classic British Open semi-final at Queen's in November. Two days after that five-set affair, the home favourite had another marathon match in the final, this time against Rob Fahey, who hasn't lost in the British

Open since something like 1936. Sayers saved 11 match points in the fifth set before the world champion finally found the knockout blow.

Were these two matches indicative of a major breakthrough for Sayers? We may well find out in the next couple of months.

RTC's British Open interest ended in the quarters, where Nick Wood found Steve Virgona too hot to handle and Ben Matthews lost in five-sets to Tim Chisholm, who then pushed Fahey very hard indeed in their semi. *For tickets to the Ben Matthews v Bryn Sayers world eliminator on 8 February, call Prested Hall on 01376 570220 or email prestedtennis@gmail.com*

Your guide to the world's courts

Two years on, Linda and Julian Sheraton-Davis continue their how-to guide

Boston

Tennis and Racquet Club, 939 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Tel: +1 617 536 4630

Website: www.tandr.org

Email: info@princescourt.com

The club was founded in 1902 and is centrally located just a few blocks south of the Charles River in the Back Bay area. The court is on the top floor of a prominent, four-storey building, while the changing rooms are in the mezzanine basement.

The bus, railroad and subway all serve this area, while parking is easy in the Prudential Centre. The court is underused in the day but very busy in the evening, as a big recruitment drive has led to many younger people dropping in at the club after work.

Newport

The National Tennis Club, 194 Bellevue Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island 02840

Tel: +1 401 849 6672

Website: www.nationaltennisclub.org

Email: jlharrington@conversent.net

The original court was built in 1880, some of which still remains after a series of fires in 1945 and 1946. It was rebuilt and the National Tennis Club was formed in 1980.

The complex is full of character and includes immaculate lawn tennis grass courts, one clay court, indoor courts, the International Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum (which recently inducted former world champion Penny Lumley) and a theatre. This is the only court in the USA that is open to the public.

For accommodation contact Ray Meyerson at Pearls Inn, Pelham Street (www.pearlsofnewport.com). Ray provides a different delicious breakfast every morning.

New York

The Racquet and Tennis Club, 370 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10012

Tel: +1 212 753 9727

Email: tennis@rtcny.org

The club premises are in a large, prominent, stone-clad building surrounded by mirrored skyscrapers. Access to the club is via the marble and mahogany-finished large entrance lobby, off which is a waiting room, supplied with comfortable seats and magazines for visitors (eg ladies!). Only men are allowed into the club, except for watching international tournaments.

The club is easily accessed by bus, by subway to 51st Street Station, by train to Grand Central or by taxi.

Tuxedo Park

The Tuxedo Club, One West Lake Road, Tuxedo Park, NY 10987

Tel: +1 845 351 4791

Website: www.thetuxedoclub.org

Email: receptionist@thetuxedoclub.org

The Tuxedo Club was established in 1886 and is run as a members' club for families. The real tennis court was added in 1899. As well as real tennis, one can also play lawn tennis, platform (paddle) tennis, rackets, squash and golf. Other facilities include a boathouse, fitness facility, swimming complex, ice skating rink and two

clubhouses. The club has a fascinating history, and it was here that a short dinner jacket was first worn and subsequently called a Tuxedo.

One needs a car to travel to this lovely country club set on a lake about an hour's drive north-west of New York City. Thanks to poorly signed roads, it's easy to become lost!

Lakewood

Georgian Court, Lakewood Campus, Georgian Court University, 900 Lakewood Ave, Lakewood, New Jersey 08701

Tel: +1 610 212-4301 (Schuyler Wickes)

Website: www.gcrealtennis.org

The court was built in 1899 as part of George Jay Gould's 156-acre country estate, and it's the second-oldest court in the United States today.

'Bachelor's Court', as it was originally known, was the home of America's finest ever amateur player and the sport's lone Olympic champion, Jay Gould II. Georgian Court was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985, and the facility underwent a renovation, culminating in 2005.

The contact for playing there is Schuyler Wickes (the son of RTC member Barbara Carse) on swickes@gcrealtennis.org. Schuyler is very helpful and he and his fellow Friends of Georgian Court are keen to spread the word that the court is up and running.

We decided to stay out of town on the coast, 15 minutes' drive away. The comfortable Victorian Bentley Inn in Bay Head is run by the friendly Glenn Kithcart (www.bentleyinn.com).

Real life begins at 50

David Watson notched up a victory in the Bridgeman Cup, the national over-50s championship, at the Oratory in November.

In his semi-final he had a very tight match against former rackets world champion John Prens. David trailed 4-5 in the first set before prevailing, and the second also went to 5-5, this time David recovering from 0-30 to win the game, set and match. His final opponent was a familiar foe, William Maltby. The MCC man was carrying an injury, however, and he was forced to retire with David leading 6-2 4-4.

As we go to press, David will be leading the UK's challenge in the Cockram Cup in Melbourne, against the US and Australia. More on this in the Spring issue.

The Royal Tennis Court
Hampton Court Palace



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realtennisclublinks@gmail.com*

Bested by Prested

RTC succumbed in Essex in the Brodie Cup

The Brodie Cup is the national inter-club knockout tournament for those over 30 handicap. RTC were handed their fourth successive away fixture in the Cup, away at Prested Hall's infamous glass-backwalled court.

First out of the traps were veteran campaigner Nick Carew Hunt and the energetic Paul Heaver. Nick appeared to be paying a heavy price for a late night at the semi-final of the British Open the previous evening. Despite Paul running his socks off, the pair were well beaten in two sets.

Hope rose for RTC as Paul Wright took to the court for the first-string singles. Paul has local knowledge of Prested and was up against an old foe. However, he looked like a man who had convinced himself that the court was conspiring against him, and went down tamely in two sets.

Not looking good so far: 24 games against, 6 games for. Cometh the hour, cometh the man: debutant Martin Daly strode on court like a colossus, carrying himself like a champion. His performance matched his demeanour, and after nipping a tight first set 6-5 he pummelled his opponent in the second, having adapted well to the nuances of the unfamiliar court.

Next up was another debutant, Justin Gregory, in the 50+ singles. This rubber is known as the 'battle of the bandits', as clubs strive to find a rapid improver. Justin played a blinder and won in two, including delivering a second-set bagel to his bewildered opponent.

So, with the match poised at 2-2, RTC's captain (Owen Saunders) and best player (Oliver Buckley) strode on court to wrap up the comeback against two players with significantly worse handicaps. However... Prested played magnificently and never let the two O's get into their stride. The result was a mauling: 6-2 6-1.

And so Prested took the spoils, 3-2. In truth the scoreline flattered us, as we were always chasing the match. The Most Valuable Player award goes to Martin Daly, for playing brilliantly to bring RTC back into the match.

Neil Astern

Wood's Words

Nick Wood on why watching the world's best players rubs off

Back in November, the RTC hosted a thrilling match between two teams in the IRTPA National League, and with well over 60 spectators the court was swamped with atmosphere and excitement. It's the ideal arena for players to get stuck in and give it their all. Competitors always throw themselves into competition, and it is made all the more exciting when there's an interested and appreciative crowd.

We saw some amazing contests throughout the evening as the tennis was skilled, powerful, fast and athletic – it was world-class. Those who were there to experience it were, I'm sure, informed and inspired to get out there and put new ideas into practice. But what is it that you are seeing? What should you practise?

Yes the ball is being hit hard, with lots of winning targets struck, and cut volley returns of serve zinging into the corners. But what is actually being demonstrated, and is plain to see, is the players' ability to prepare well for shots, to read and predict the position on the court and to move swiftly and in a balanced manner to achieve the best possible outcome. Early racket preparation, watching the

ball, timing, agile footwork and calculation of positioning are all there in plain sight. Without these solid fundamental aspects drilled into a player's psyche, all the wonderful shots on show would not be possible.

So the next time you come along to support world-class tennis, perhaps on Saturday 28 January, take the time to watch a player closely, to observe how they move, prepare and choose their shots. Try focusing on one player rather than the ball, and compare what you see with the opponent. There is no one way to play this game, but what are true to all styles are the basic fundamentals.

Once you've been inspired by the skill on display and you've observed some specific and achievable aspects of the game, then practise, practise, practise.

The next match takes place at the Royal Tennis Court on the evening of Saturday 28 January. Your ticket includes a glass of Pol Roger champagne and dinner. What better way to spend a Saturday evening! Ticket prices: Front Row dedans £25, Back Row dedans £20, Upper Gallery £15

AUTUMN NIGHT PENNANT (HANDICAPS 40-55)

The autumn incarnation of the popular Thursday staple, the night pennant competition, was the turn of the 40-55 handicaps, and despite some keen competition there was one trio whose results stood out throughout the three months of the event.

The team of Dick Cowling, Karen Prottey and Justin Gregory, three improving players, remarkably lost only two of their 15 singles sets during their relentless march to the title. In their

earlier group match against Paul Newton, Sarah Parsons and David Peregrine-Jones, the table-toppers had lost all three doubles rubbers to suffer their one defeat, but in the final they reversed that completely, breezing to a 10-4 win. Karen's strong volleying in particular must come in handy during the doubles.

Over those 12 weeks, Dick reduced his handicap from 42 to 38, Karen from 55 to 52 and Justin from 52 to 50. Little wonder they were hard to stop.



From left: Paul Newton, Sarah Parsons, David Peregrine-Jones, Dick Cowling, Karen Prottey and Justin Gregory

Behind the grille

The latest news on TLC for the club, on and off court

New court lighting

The ongoing discussions with major lighting manufactures have taken longer than we hoped. The new lights have to meet the following criteria: low energy usage, provision of high light levels, reasonable size, satisfactory colour rendering and reasonable cost.

We have been aware of lighting failures and have had a number of fittings repaired. Together with assistance from Historic Royal Palaces, we will hopefully have a reasonable lighting system very soon indeed.

New court boiler

We have made some progress in this regard, in that possible locations for the new boiler have been found. We hope

to overcome the various physical and historic issues and have a new, more efficient boiler in spring/summer 2012.

Maintenance matters

A new coat of non-slip varnish has been applied to the court in early January. This should reduce the risk of anyone slipping.

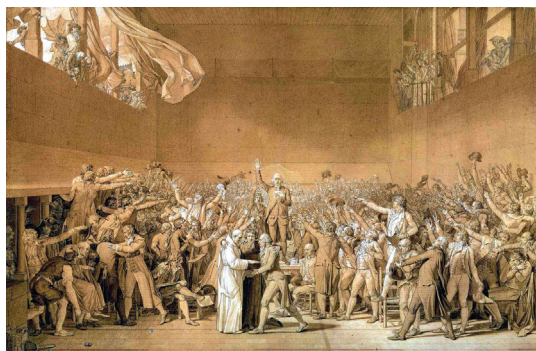
A dry rot outbreak has been found under the seating in the dedans. HRP is currently dealing with this – however, it is possible that the seating may have to be removed so that remedial works can be undertaken.

The back (hazard end) corridor and stairway are in the process of being decorated, and we are also hoping to improve the lighting in this area.

Julian Sheraton-Davis MRICS

Carol Service

The Carol Service in the Chapel Royal was another success. Many then headed for the court for mince pies and refreshments – although, as this picture shows, there was a minor disturbance when someone unwisely announced that there was only one glass of mulled wine left...



AN APOLOGY FROM THE EDITOR

Many of you will have been shocked to receive your Royal Tennis Court newsletter only to find a cover without a single Watson on it. I appreciate that you will have expected a Watsonian cover to follow the 2011 hat-trick of club champion David (Spring), doubles champions David and James (Summer), and Lathom Browne winner Oliver (Autumn), and I apologise for the oversight. No doubt normal service will be resumed before long if the family continues its success.

RTC Top Ten

Leading handicaps
December 2011

| | | |
|----|--------------|------|
| 1 | Peter Wright | 3.4 |
| 2 | Dave Harms | 5.8 |
| 3 | Robert Hird | 7.1 |
| 4 | David Watson | 10.3 |
| 5 | James Watson | 13.3 |
| 6 | James Sohl | 14.7 |
| 7 | Simon Barker | 15.7 |
| 8 | Phil Dunn | 17.4 |
| 9 | Tom Freeman | 18.3 |
| 10 | Karen Hird | 20.6 |

Ladies' Top Ten

Leading handicaps
December 2011

| | | |
|----|---------------------|------|
| 1 | Karen Hird | 20.6 |
| 2 | Sue Haswell | 28.1 |
| 3 | Alex Garside | 29.2 |
| 4 | Nicola Doble | 30.7 |
| 5 | Elvira Campione | 41.0 |
| 6 | Viveca Stewart | 42.0 |
| 7 | Clare Weatherill | 43.6 |
| 8 | Carolyn Nicholls | 45.7 |
| 9 | Barbara Carse | 47.2 |
| 10 | Helen-F. Pilkington | 48.0 |

RESULTS

Seal Salver (2010/11)

Semi-finals: Patrick Jenkins beat Michael Day 9-3; Bernard Weatherill beat John East.

Final: Weatherill beat Jenkins 9-6.

Chetwood Trophy

Semi-finals: Giles Gunning (Seacourt) beat Alan Moug (Moreton Morrell) 6-2; Oli Watson (RTC) beat Adrian Thurley (Newmarket) 6-1.

Final: Watson beat Gunning 6-4.

De Laszlo Bowl

Semi-finals: Helen-Frances Pilkington & Terry Marsh beat Mike Pope & Peter Flood 8-5; Alan Dallamore & Sarah Parsons beat Dan Callaghan & Martin Bronstein 8-7.

Final: Dallamore & Parsons beat Pilkington & Marsh 8-4.

Autumn Night Pennant

Group stage table:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| Cowling/Gregory/Prottey | 36 pts |
| Newton/Parsons/Peregrine-Jones | 31 pts |
| Stephens/Smith/Lawrence | 26 pts |
| Benger/Mulcahy/Flood | 23 pts |
| Sheraton-Davis/Buxton/Marsh | 19 pts |

Preliminary final: Newton/Parsons/Peregrine-Jones beat Stephens/Smith/Lawrence 8-6.

Final: Cowling/Gregory/Prottey beat Newton/Parsons/Peregrine-Jones 10-4; Dick Cowling beat Paul Newton 6-4; Justin Gregory lost to Sarah Parsons 3-6; Karen Prottey beat David Peregrine-Jones 6-1; Cowling & Gregory beat Newton & Parsons 6-1; Cowling & Prottey beat Newton & Peregrine-Jones 6-4; Gregory & Prottey beat Parsons & Peregrine-Jones 6-4.

Barker Camm Cup

Grade E, semi-finals: Robin Mulcahy beat Will Squire 6-1 6-2; Sarah Parsons beat Andy Anderson 6-0 6-2.

Final: Parsons beat Mulcahy 6-2 6-4.

Grade D, semi-finals: Dick Cowling beat Martin Daly 3-6 6-5 6-5; Paul Newton beat Elvira Campione 6-5 2-6 6-4.

The Royal Tennis Court Newsletter

is published four times a year and the editor would love any contributions from members. Please get in touch if you have any ideas for the spring issue, either via the professionals or by email at the address below.

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