



# THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT



*Picture: Patricia Gallagher*

## C'est magnifique!

Chapman and Doble banish Brexit blues in Paris

*See page 3*

A Royal visitor graces our court

*See Page 5*

**The Winter Newsletter 2018**

Number 123

# CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

This year continues to provide spectacular highlights in the life of The Royal Tennis Court. Pride of place goes to RTC tournament professional Chris Chapman. Chris won his first Open title in Paris in September, beating Ben Taylor-Matthews in straight sets and in doing so, became RTC's first resident professional Open champion since...? Well, I'm sure one of our historian members will enlighten me. He followed it up with a great performance in the British Open in November, beating Matthew Sarlangue, Tim Chisholm and Steve Virgona before going down to Rob Fahey in three very tight sets in the final. Chris has now consolidated his World No.3 ranking with his tennis improving dramatically since the turn of the year.

In our round of congratulations, let's also celebrate Nicola Doble winning the French Open Ladies' Doubles with partner Clare Fahey – another great achievement. I was also very proud of the fact that in Nick Wood, Josh Smith, Peter Wright, Phil Dunn and Ed Kay, RTC was strongly represented in the British Open.

I went to watch a couple of days at Queens – it's a wonderful club with super facilities and admirably run by former RTC professional Ben Ronaldson. However, I was struck by the library-like atmosphere while most matches were being played. Maybe it's because Queens' members have the chance to see a lot of tournament-level tennis - but we sure do manage to make a lot more noise in support of our players in big matches at RTC.

We were thrilled at the end of November to host HRH The Earl of Wessex for the last leg of his marathon tour of Real Tennis Clubs in support of The Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme. In the morning, more than 50 local school students experienced Real Tennis for the first time. His Royal Highness arrived at midday and started with a session with our junior squad, which was a memorable experience for all of them.

Our three raffle-winning members thoroughly enjoyed their set and all our member spectators were delighted to watch the two final sets. The first was with Rob and Clare Fahey and Penny Lumley, and the second with Tim Henman and Johanna Konta, accompanied by Nick Wood. The Earl's stamina, determination and standard of tennis through a long day were impressive and it was

fascinating to watch two great Lawn Tennis players grapple with the intricacies of our game. It was a marvellous day and a fitting end to his great world tour, through which His Royal Highness has done so much to promote Real Tennis to many new and different people.



We had a super celebratory evening on court for the annual Prizegiving supper in October, with former RTC playing member John Inverdale as our guest speaker. Big thanks to Owen Saunders and his Social Committee for organising it. Elsewhere in this Newsletter, we highlight an idea to set up a number of teams of members to help occasionally with particular tasks or events. RTC members have always been generous with their time and skills to help run our club, so if you feel you can help in any of the ways we are thinking about, please don't be shy and put your name forward.

Another matter we discussed was the cost of posting the Newsletter to members. We appreciate that some people really like to have a printed version delivered in the post and for them, things will continue unchanged. But if you're happy to collect your copy from the Club or to receive a digital (and full-colour) version by email, please let us know. We think there's potential to save several hundred pounds annually.

A couple of times each year, I attend a meeting of all Chairs of British Real Tennis Clubs, so that we can support each other, exchange ideas and liaise with the T&RA. Most clubs are still preoccupied by how to raise membership numbers and court usage. In contrast, we're recording monthly figures of around 97% occupancy of courts between 7am and 11pm. However, it's still possible for everyone who wishes to play to do so regularly. So, I'd urge you to book all your three courts ahead, take advantage of the 10pm courts not counting in your booking allowance and watch your inbox for the last-minute 'Game for you' emails.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at the annual carol service on 11<sup>th</sup> December and for mince pies afterwards and I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

**Michael Day CVO**



# The force in France is with us!

Chris Chapman and Nicola Doble scored a double triumph for RTC by winning the Mens' Open Singles and Ladies' Open Doubles titles at the French Open in Paris in September.

Chris started his campaign well by defeating top RTC amateur Peter Wright 6/5, 6/4, 6/0 before playing Parisian favourite Mattieu Sarlangue in front of a raucous but respectful dedans at the Société Sportive du Jeu de Paume in the French capital. Chris proved too strong on the night and won in straight sets 6/3, 6/4, 6/3.

His next opponent was his doubles partner Steve Virgona who stretched him to five sets, Chris winning out 6/3, 6/2, 5/6, 2/6, 6/4. With that man Fahey falling in the other semi-final to Ben Taylor-Matthews 6/3, 6/5, 6/4 the final was something to look forward to.

On the night Chris hit top form on pretty much every shot you can think of and beat Ben in straight sets 6/0, 6/4, 6/1 to clinch his first French Open title.



**Eye on the ball - Chris in action**

*Picture: Patricia Gallagher*

Hopes were high for a 'double' in the Mens' Doubles, but despite battling through to reach the final, Chris and partner Steve Virgona were beaten 4/6, 6/3, 2/6, 6/2, 6/4 in an epic match by John Lumley and Ben Taylor-Matthews.

An honourable mention must go to RTC's Josh Smith, who braved Parisian traffic and rocked up in his trusty van, only to face a baptism of fire by drawing World Champion Rob Fahey in the first round! To his great credit Josh nicked a set off the World No. 2 before succumbing 6/2, 3/6, 6/2, 6/3.

Meanwhile in the Ladies' Singles competition Nicola Doble had a tough draw against second seed and Ladies'

Rackets World Champion Lea van der Zwalmen. Playing valiantly after what has been a successful summer of tennis for Nicola, Lea proved a stretch too far and won 6/1, 6/1. Lea was beaten 6/1, 6/3 in the final by Claire Fahey.

There was better news in the Ladies' Doubles, where Nicola and her new partner Claire Fahey proved too strong for Penny Lumley and Alex Garside with a match score of 6/0, 6/1. The final pitted Nicola and Claire against Lea van der Zwalmen and Jess Garside who put up a great fight but lost 6/3, 6/3.

It was a great result for our players, who once again proved the depth and strength found within RTC. *Encore!*



**Ooh la la...Nicola and Chris with their medals**



**Nicola Doble in full flow** *Pictures: Patricia Gallagher*



# An evening to be prized



Club Singles champion Tom Freeman with John Inverdale

More than 70 members convened on court in October to celebrate the many playing successes of the most recent season. The 'predominantly white' dress code led to a wonderful mix of tennis kit, 'our man in Havana' crumpled linen, cocktail dress chic and Bjorn Borg fancy dress.

Our Guest of Honour, television sports commentator John Inverdale, a 20s handicap player until his knees gave up, entertained the crowd with his ruminations on the 'magnificently silly game' of real tennis, segueing through rugby and netball on the way.

Prizes were awarded to members at all levels of the game, culminating in Tom Freeman taking the Club Singles Championship. The Ronaldson Trophy, awarded to the most improved player, went to Vanessa Packham.

The formal part of the evening ended with a tribute to Nick Wood, who celebrated 10 years at Hampton Court (in his second stint), and a very gracious speech by Nick sharing his thoughts on his time here and his thanks to his fellow Professionals and to members.

**Owen Saunders**

*Pictures: Dough Sheperdigian*



The vastly-improved Ross Morrison



Nick Wood, Latham Browne winner Doug Sheperdigian and John Inverdale



Michael Day, CVO, 'most improved player' Vanessa Packham and John Inverdale



I won this once: Benedict Treloar and partner



**HRH Prince Edward The Earl of Wessex on our court with local schoolchildren**

# A right Royal day

His Royal Highness Prince Edward, The Earl of Wessex, graced our court at the end of November for a fabulous day of Real Tennis skills and socialising as a rousing finale to his year-long tour of all the world's 50 Real Tennis courts in support of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Awards.

Having played Real Tennis for his own Gold Award when he was at university, HRH undertook his tour to raise funds and awareness for the award to enable more young people to take part in our glorious sport across the globe.

The day started at 9am when the club's Professionals and Junior Development Officer Sarah Parsons took to the court with children from three local schools - Tiffin Girls, Waldegrave Girls and Orleans Park - to demonstrate the history and basics of the game. After a photo opportunity on court with the schoolchildren and HRH, lunch was served in the club rooms.

In the early afternoon HRH teamed up with RTC's junior George Parsons to play against fellow juniors Ivan Barker and Alex Neale, eventually winning a hard-fought tussle 8/5.

HRH then teamed up with RTC's Giles Doy to play against Barbara Carse and Graeme Marks - all winners of the club's raffle to play with/against HRH - and gallantly went down 5/9 when the clock stopped.



**His Royal Highness with RTC's Lesley Ronaldson**

At 4.30 the all-star team of Rob and Claire Fahey played the Prince, partnered by former Ladies' World Champion Penny Lumley, winning 6/7. Then came a surprise celebrity outing as former Wimbledon player Tim Henman took his place alongside HRH to play Nick Wood and Wimbledon UK ladies star Johanna Konta, sportingly trying the game for the first time - which rather explains the HRH/Henman 6/4 victory.

All in all - a fabulous day, played in true sporting spirit!

## It's that man again

Rob Fahey clinched an astonishing 50th Open title by beating RTC's Chris Chapman in the final of the British Open at the end of November.

The World Champion won 6/5, 6/4, 6/4 at Queen's in what all spectators agreed was a stunning display of Real Tennis from both players.

Fahey and Nick Howell then went one step further to take the British Open Mens Doubles title, beating Chris Chapman and Steve Virgona 6/3, 6/5, 6/2 in the final.

It was not the result we hoped for, but it was still a great week for RTC, with Peter Wright and Josh Smith both

making the cut through to the first round and gaining huge and valuable experience along the way.

Chris and Peter both had strong runs in the IRTPA Championship; Peter losing to Darren Long in the first round and Chris losing to John Lumley (the eventual winner) in the semi-final.



# Getting into the spirit of things

*RTC'S Ian Wimbush and Tony Cook took a jolly jaunt to the handicap doubles Trois Triots Tournament in France recently, played at Bayonne, La Bastide Clairence and Pau. This is how they got on...*

We based ourselves in Bayonne which looked like the best place to stay for the three courts. Tony's choice proved great because the town has lots of restaurants and a great Guinness Bar that had happy hour from 4-8pm. This suited us as a great place to plan the next day's strategy of play!

The tournament is played on Trinquet courts, which are different to our court but very interesting. As well as the serious matter of playing our plan was simple: to do as well as possible while enjoying the comradery of real tennis.

There were 24 teams in total. We played for one of the De-danist teams organised by Carl Snitcher who did an exceptional job getting us in the right place at the right time (not easy). We played four games per session, all doubles matches each lasting about 30 minutes (some of us played twice). Most days we had two games on different courts, which



meant travelling round and seeing the different venues plus lots of tennis and footwork.

The orange balls took some getting used to, as did the narrow penthouses which resulted in a few double faults at crucial times as the nerves set in. However, we did make it through to the next round, aided by plenty of good spirit and socialising.

As Carl said: "It's all about comradeship, friendship and taking part. But it's also great to do well and we thank you for making it work so seamlessly."

The tournament was won by a Dutch team and the trophy was presented at the end of tournament dinner in the wonderful Chateau De Arcangues, which was incredible: the wine flowed and the whole evening was a great event.

As to the courts played, here's our view: Bastide Clairence - if visiting on a Sunday ensure you book the restaurant otherwise its ham and cheese. Bayonne by the castle walls has lots of restaurants and bars. Urrugne: the court is behind the bar and next to a magnificent church!

## Board Talk: highlights from 17/9.

*Present: Michael Day (Chairman), Nicola Doble, John Halliday, Paul Newton, Owen Saunders, Ian Wimbush, Nick Wood, Andy Anderson*

**Matters Arising:** NW will check back with the T&RA on how many RTC playing members have not yet signed up to RTO.

**Strategy Review (an annual review, and in response to the request from the AGM to consider how we can best support them):** It was agreed that the top-level published strategic objectives remain fit for purpose and that our actions as our Board are considered and taken in support of them. The membership sub-committee wants to take further steps to encourage younger men and women to join RTC and has set a more ambitious objective of recruiting to a level of 50 U25 and Junior members by the end of 2019, with the aim of maintaining that at a sustainable level going forward. NW is keen to look at our communications, including social media. OS will put together a briefing paper on communications for the next Board meeting. IW will look to engage someone who can help with the Pros' IT platform, which is showing its age.

**Professional's Report:** NW noted that court usage continued to be good, and that we enjoy around 100 members who play regularly. He is very pleased with the playing progress of both Chris Chapman and Josh Smith. CC has opened a gap in world ranking points with those behind him, and that is likely to continue. JS is progressing well in both singles and doubles.

The Board agreed that NW would respond to the National League that our NL matches would continue to start at 7pm, but in order to enable matches to finish in good time we would ensure that the RTC team was ready to start play promptly, and that we would be open to agree curtailed sets to keep to time as is allowed for in the NL rules. JS may go to Newport RI for a few weeks in 2019 to gain further experience after his trip to Melbourne in 2017, with Peter Dickinson (a USC-TA student) coming to RTC as a swap.

**Finance:** IW reported that work will continue to reduce outstanding bills. Income and expense is in line with budget.

**Premises:** It was agreed that RTC should look to agree a closure schedule each year, with a planning meeting with HRP early each year. The intent is not to establish regular closure periods, but to ensure that should a closure period be necessary, it is planned well in advance at a mutually convenient time.

**Membership:** The Board thanked ND for the success she has had in reorganising the membership database. The Board agreed that existing members choosing to pay by cheque should receive a 10% surcharge to recognise the increased administration burden.

**Social:** The Board thanked Annie Day, as well as Lindsay and Jane Hatchett, for their efforts in making the Chairman's Drinks evening such a success. The Board agreed that the King's Goblet had been very successful once again. The Carol Service is scheduled for Tuesday 11th December.

**Any Other Business: National League Premier Division** - Four teams will take part this year, each team undertaking three matches, one home, one away, one to be bid for.

Since August I have been fortunate to have played in four tournaments in my busiest period of real tennis: The Pell Cup, French Open, IRTPA Satellite and British Open. The tournaments cover singles, doubles and a wide range of opposition, from players I was ranked above to facing the best player our game has ever seen. There were matches where I played my best tennis to date - and matches where it was quite the opposite! They were all opportunities to learn and develop.

As in writing, my first thoughts go to preparation. Ensuring one prepares as well as possible is critical to success on the court (which doesn't necessarily mean winning). I see preparation in three areas: mental, physical and technical, all of which must come together to produce a good performance. In both preparation and performance we must be smart and dedicated, in attitude and in effort.

On any given day, we can only perform to the best of our ability. In my good performances I prepared well for the specific occasion. In matches where I played poorly I now recognise errors in my preparation which resulted in the poor play. I have learnt that, for me, I must prepare to *play* as well as I can on the day. One must not prepare to *win*. This is an important distinction.

Preparing for Mr Robert Fahey was a difficult and daunting task. I was so convinced that I would walk away with not a single game to my name that my preparation focused on remaining relaxed and confident in what I can do, to play with enjoyment and to embrace the experience. This turned out to be the perfect tactic, and I played some of

## Just Joshing

### RTC's Josh Smith reflects on lessons learned - some of them the hard way

the best tennis I have played so far.

The next event was different. Facing an opponent I felt I could beat I mistakenly prepared to win - and my focus was slightly misaligned. This error in judgement and attention contributed to a poor performance - and intense frustration. I now know I need to focus on the process, not the result. Dedicate myself to the process, control only what I can control - this is what I need to do to play well and avoid frustration. I can see in writing this that mental preparation is a particular focus for me, but this only one piece of the puzzle.

My experiences in both these matches have thrown into sharp focus those aspects of my game that are my strengths - and also areas where I can be exploited. Now I must apply this knowledge to enhance my game and move it to the next level.

My match against Leon Smart (Boston T&R Club) was a good example of this. After settling my nerves through the first set I played and won a good second set, where my strengths in the floor game put Leon under pressure. Recognising this, Leon switched his

serve to one I was required to volley, which had a profound impact on the match - Leon had changed the game to his advantage! My volley return did not do enough damage and, despite exploring different options, I was not able to swing the match back to my favour.

Thank you, Leon! Through exposing this weakness I now have a priority area to improve. Having prepared well for this game my shortcomings were no longer frustrating. I know I played to the best of my ability, which can only improve with time and effective practice.

I endeavour to be successful in everything I do; to learn, adapt and apply are my keys to success. I have learnt a tremendous amount of late and look forward to working hard to keep improving, both on and off court.

This is not a solo journey; building a team that supports you is another critical factor. I am incredibly fortunate and thankful to the whole team at RTC, and also to Steve Hunt, whose efforts in support cannot be measured. I would also like to thank all the RTC membership and beyond - the amount of support I received in these last few months was both surprising and humbling. I will keep learning and applying myself as best I can, both for my own success and for those who support me.

Reflections written, I ask you, the reader: what have *you* learnt, and how are you going to apply it?

A final thought...this article didn't quite turn out how I thought it would, but then things often don't. Perhaps that is another lesson to be learnt!

## Wood's Words

Ever wondered why we 'cut' the ball in real tennis?

The obvious benefit of 'cut' is that it brings the ball down off the back wall - however, there is a far more important and fundamental reason to the 'cut' action...it is the most effective means of striking the ball well and consistently.

Using an optimal process and a sound technique to strike the ball will allow for greater control and accuracy of shot.

To get the best technique we adapt to the equipment we use and the environment we play in to find the

most appropriate means of achieving a successful outcome. So why a 'cut' action?

The bounce of the real tennis ball is generally very low, lower than that of your racquet hand. With good racquet preparation, the racquet must travel *down* to the low bounce of the ball; so the swing travels high to low. As we are swinging down to the ball, we need an open-faced racquet head to create the necessary lift to clear the net.

(Think of a golf shot, where you hit on the down swing and the lofted club head does the lifting). We can look at the opposite - a lawn tennis ball has a high bounce, often above the racquet hand, so

the racquet must travel upwards to strike the ball. A low to high swing will encourage top spin. You'll find more top spin with a higher bounce. Compare clay court tennis to grass court tennis.

Back to the real game - as most balls are struck below knee height, and practically every shot can be achieved with the 'cut' action, I recommend you gain an in-depth understanding of the 'cut' and practice it as your primary shot. Remember, your primary objective is to achieve a clean strike, not to impart back spin; back spin is just a result of good technique and a clean strike.

**Nick Wood**





# We were all Bowled over

A total of 28 players enjoyed the de Laszlo Bowl fun doubles event over the weekend of 29 and 30 September, with some dazzling displays of competitive tennis all played in the true spirit of our wonderful game.

The 'golden rule' of the de Lazlo contest is that, following the serve, neither player at either end can then cross (even by a footfall) the centre line of the court. Some highly creative interpretations of this rule were displayed on the day by the more experienced players...

Members of all standards enjoying sharing the court throughout this great tournament, with pairings created by teaming up the highest handicap with the lowest handicap players.

The event comprised three matches in a group stage on Saturday to qualify for a further three matches on the Sunday,

Do you ever think you'd like to help out at the Club, but think that committees are boring and you haven't got enough time? You're not alone...

In the last few years the Club has built up some great events. Think of the King's Goblet, the Champions Trophy, the Chairman's Quiz and Chairman's Drinks, the Fancy Dress Challenge, the Prizegiving, the ever-popular Carol Service and big matches like The Eliminator and exhibitions. These all take up a lot of time and effort.

We are giving members the opportunity to join up to one of eight Teams that will help continue to build on the success of these events. With a pool of people happy to assist on specific tasks, you will be called upon from time to time to help out when you can.



Owen Saunders, Peta Louise Jeffery, Doug Sheperdigian and Graham Davidson

plus a final. The de Lazlo is often dominated by a balanced/equal handicap pair, but this year was different with pairings of 24 & 103, 36 & 89, 39 & 86 all making the Sunday group stage and two

of these teams making the final. Congratulations go to Owen Saunders and Peta Louise Jeffery for winning the title, overcoming Doug Sheperdigian and Graham Davidson in the final 8 games to 6.

No boring meetings – guaranteed!.

The teams will be **The Super Stewards** (stewarding at events), **The Greenfingers** (helping to get the garden ready for summer events), **The Bar-B-Crew** (manning the bbq), **The Star Bakers** (cake-making for tournaments and events), **The Luggers** (heavy lifting for event set-up), **Too Many Cooks** (helping out with small-scale catering at tournaments and events), **The Digital Gang** (streaming and social media) and **The Interior Designers** (dressing the venues in advance of big events).

If you are interested in joining one of the teams and helping the club continue to thrive, please email me at [osaunders@hotmail.com](mailto:osaunders@hotmail.com). Then sit back and wait for the call!

**Every year the Club spends more than £1,200 on postage to send out hard copies of the Newsletter. In the interests of cost saving as well as the environmental benefit of using less paper and fewer envelopes, the Board and Newsletter Editor would like to use e-mailed delivery as the primary means of distribution. This delivers the Newsletter to you much quicker and in full glorious colour. Nevertheless, all social and overseas members will continue to receive hard copies by post, and you can request a hard copy by post if you prefer. Please let our Membership Secretary Nicola Doble know if you would like to receive your Newsletter by post at [nicola.doble@gmail.com](mailto:nicola.doble@gmail.com), or leave a message with the Professionals.**