



THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT



Oh YES!

Oh no...Chris Chapman goes down fighting
against a rampant Steve Virgona

See pages 4 and 5

Focus on Juniors, the lifeblood of the club's future

See Page 3

The Spring Newsletter 2018

Number 120

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

It has been a remarkable three months since the last newsletter was published, during which we have seen RTC at its very best.

First, just before Christmas, more than 250 members and their families came together in the Chapel Royal for our wonderful annual carol service, followed by drinks and mince pies on court. Thanks especially to Helen Crossley for organising the service again.

In early February, we were delighted to host what was the most important match at RTC for a generation, when Chris Chapman played Steve Virgona from Chicago in their World Championship Eliminator. We had a capacity crowd to watch more than three hours of extraordinary tennis; you can read a full report on Page 4. The result was not what we hoped for, but we should all pay tribute to Chris for reaching this stage and giving a valiant performance against an opponent playing sublime tennis on the night. The atmosphere in the club and around the court was superb and we are especially grateful to our three sponsors for their support.

Associated with this match, we held a fundraising exhibition doubles evening, with Nick and Josh playing former RTC professional Stef King and club champion Phil Dunn, which through some creative crowd interference from the dedans went to 5/5 40-all in the deciding set. Also around this event, we organised an invitation doubles,

played over three days, featuring 20 members across the whole handicap range, with Nick and Josh playing singles. Sounds complicated but it was great fun and produced worthy winners in John Leach and Doug Sheperdigian.



The three-day series of events was organised superbly by Owen Saunders and his committee, and by Nick Wood and the professional team – all working together and big thanks to them. I was very proud of everything the club delivered, showing that we can deliver tennis events at the highest level.

The Board continues to meet regularly and we are introducing below an update for members on some of the things that we have been covering. If you have anything to suggest about any aspect of running the club, please let one of us know.

We have much to look forward to in the coming months including the King's Goblet and the Champions Trophy. Tickets for the latter, featuring most of the world's top players, are on sale now. The Chairman's Event Pub Quiz will be on Saturday May 12, and finally, please note that the AGM is on Sunday May 13. It's an important moment in the club's year so do come and support it.

Michael Day CVO

Members of the Board of RTC work hard to keep the club running smoothly. Not all actions or ideas are immediately visible – so here is the first of a regular wrap-up of what's bubbling in the background. Please do ask any Board member if you would like to know more.

Board Meeting February 5 2018.

Present: Michael Day (Chairman), Helen Crossley, Nicola Doble, Phil Dunn, John Halliday, Paul Mather, Paul Newton (Secretary), Owen Saunders, Ian Wimbush, Nick Wood, Andy Anderson (Newsletter), Sarah Parsons (Juniors)

Matters Arising; The Chairman's event is moved to Saturday 12th May 2018 as the previous date clashed with the final of the World Championship at Queen's Club.

Professionals' Report: The Board was pleased to hear of the high level of commitment and performance of both Chris Chapman (tournament professional) and Josh Smith (junior professional), and thanks NW for his nurturing and management of their skills and contribution.

Finance: The outcome for 2017 is in line with the budget. The budget for 2018 was provisionally agreed with some aspects still under discussion. Streaming set-up costs will be written off over three years.

Premises: The 2017 premises budget was

underspent by £1,500 due to work in JS's flat being held over to 2018.

Membership: No new applications for membership have been received, three trial memberships have been taken up. The Board concluded that no further work should take place in making the membership handbook available to members either in hard copy format (cost) or online (security concerns), vs the need. The early section of the current handbook is catered for with the new members' pack. Anyone who needs to contact another member can do so through the pros' office.

Tennis and Tournaments: The King's Goblet will be a four-day event (vs three in 2017) with 24 pairs, and is expected to be fully subscribed. ND presented an analysis of the participation of women in competitions and in winning prizes. It was concluded that women are not under-represented, rather that RTC has few women playing members and their handicaps are skewed above 60. The T&T sub-committee will look at options to increase the number of women members, an ongoing Board objective.

Social: The Board thanked HC and OS for their hard work in delivering another excellent Carol Service.

Any Other Business: Eliminator update: The Eliminator between CC and Steve Virgona (taking place a few days after the meeting) gave an opportunity to showcase the club as well as high-quality tennis. Video stream-

ing is in place (30 frames per second; upgrade to 60 fps would require improved cabling) and within budget. The Board thanked OS and his team for their hard work, and praised Oliver Buckley for introducing good-quality video streaming within the constraints imposed by a historic environment.

Juniors (SP): The success of the junior programme is evident in that juniors are beginning to enter tournaments (Peter Luck-Hill inter-club tournament, handicap junior event at Wellington, Paris junior tournament in April). A beginners' programme will start in April - contacts are being made with local schools (15 state, 6 private). JS is supporting the programme strongly.

For the 18-30 age group, the Middlesex and Manchester clubs are good at recruiting local university students and SP will work on establishing links with Kingston and St Mary's with JS's help.

The junior fund is available; SP to decide how best to use it. It was agreed that Junior subs and court fees would remain unchanged. (See story on opposite page).

Newsletter update (Andy Anderson): We will keep a mono format (vs colour), with colour available by e-mail and on the website.

HRH DofE challenge: HRH The Earl of Wessex is touring real tennis courts of the world to raise money for the DofE programme and to introduce potential DofE candidates to the game. We expect him to play at RTC later this year.

Young guns, go for it!

Sarah Parsons looks to the future with a new focus on the club's Junior members

I've recently taken on the role of Junior Development Coordinator (JDO) at RTC. Having a real passion for the game myself, which luckily has also spread to my children, I was delighted to take on the position.

My role is twofold: first, to ensure that our existing Junior members have the opportunity to play, both at RTC and at other clubs, and second, to grow our Junior programme and get more youngsters aware of, and involved in, this historic sport.

A Junior Membership at RTC covers players under the age of 25. According to our membership records we currently have 35 members aged 25 or under. (RTC has roughly 400 members, of which just under 200 are considered to be regular players.) Juniors pay no club joining fee and are charged a very reasonable £50 per year sub. Court fees for those under 25 are £5.50, compared with £13.50 for an adult.

I am delighted to report that our Junior development programme is going from strength to strength. We designed our program around four specific coaching groups (beginner, intermediate, development and performance) with each coaching level designed to give the very best opportunity for learning, improvement and fun.

This has enabled younger players to start competing in tournaments (you may well have come up against a junior in the Lathome Browne) as well as be able to play more non-tournament matches against adult members.

We had five RTC Juniors compete in the British Junior Handicap Tournament at Wellington in December. Particular congratulations go to Toby Marriott and James Parsons, who reached the semi-finals. We also competed for the second year in the Peter Luck-Hille inter-club junior event, aimed at developing under 18-year-olds. Our season results so far are a draw result against Petworth followed by a good win against



Here's looking at you kids: the RTC team in a Peter Luck-Hille match versus Petworth

the Oratory School, with our next match against Wellington. Success in that could give us the opportunity to play in the finals in the summer.

In addition, RTC members James and George Parsons did very well recently in the National Schools Real Tennis Handicap Doubles (Juniors) held at the Oratory School. They were representing Orleans Park School in Twickenham and reached the final, where they narrowly lost to Wellington - could they be the first state school to get to the final?

'I am delighted to report that our Junior development programme is going from strength to strength'

As well as improving our coaching methods on court, we are keen to make the club more of a social environment for our younger players. We recently contacted members in the 18 to 30 age group with the hope that we can start some semi-regular tennis and social evenings, advancing and improving their tennis while creating more cohesion amongst the club's young players. This will also support our plans to approach St Marys and Kingston univer-

sities during Freshers' Week to get a university programme started.

In addition to universities we want to approach local secondary schools, in particular state schools, to get more youngsters involved. We do have a junior fund of circa £2k which can help subsidise lessons if needed.

We are also running a Beginners Introduction Session in the Easter Holidays, suitable for age 10+. The sessions will be a stepping stone into our wonderful sport, learning about the rules, technique and game play as well as meeting other youngsters who are keen to take up real tennis. The sessions are for boys and girls alike - our programme is currently stronger amongst young boys so we would love to increase the number of girls who may take up the game.

PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD! If you know of any youngsters who would like to try the game, get in touch with the Pros' office or contact me, Sarah Parsons, at jdo@royaltenniscourt.com.

Beginner Introduction Session Dates:
Thursday 5th April 10am & Friday 6th April at 10am
Thursday 12th April 10am & Friday 13th April at 10am

Vanquished by Virgona

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. After battling through to his first World Championship Eliminator match, RTC's Chris Chapman, fighting to the last point, was beaten five sets to love by Steve Virgona, of the Racquet Club of Chicago.

A capacity crowd of more than packed the dedans and galleries on Thursday February 8 to witness some scintillating tennis and to cheer on our local hero, but in the end it was Virgona – described by spectators as 'pumped', 'up for it' and 'downright scary' - who clinched the near three and a half hour match, having exercised his right to play a deciding fifth set on reaching 4-0 up.

On paper it might have been a risky decision to avoid the second day's play (scheduled for Saturday) but doubt or lack of self-belief seemed alien to the World Number 3.

The opening rest was an ominous omen. Chris, having won the toss, fired down one of his trademark railroads. The left-handed Virgona turned on a sixpence and, while Chris was sprinting for the forehand corner in anticipation, fired a blistering forehand volley into the middle of the dedans. Never



Steve's athleticism and speed drew gasps from the packed crowd

has a 15-0 first point drawn such a gasp from a crowd.

More gasps – of sympathy – greeted Chris's second shot, which clipped the net cord and fell hazard – service lost already. The game ran to deuce, Steve gained advantage with a grille shot and closed out in style – 1-0 up.

The second game went to Steve, the third to Chris, the fourth to Steve. The fifth game was a corker, going to deuce time and again and with Chris twice having advantage, only to surrender the game with a net error. Steve, showing tremendous athleticism, took the sixth game and in the seventh, 40-15 up and setting a half-yard chase, closed out the

The benefits of benefactors

Fred Satow, one of nine RTC T&RA benefactors and a T&RA director and trustee, writes:

The T&RA Benefactor Scheme was established in 2013 and since then more than 85 T&RA members have agreed to become Benefactors and make additional contributions in excess of the normal annual subscription to help the T&RA enhance and develop Real Tennis for future generations.

The T&RA finances are in a satisfactory state having been carefully managed so as to cover routine expenditure out of recurring income. Following the conclusion of Neptune's sponsorship of Real Tennis, the Association now faces a period where keeping that balance is going to prove extremely challenging. It may need to ask donors to help bridge the funding gap. In addition, we face a real risk that we will not have the resources to meet the frequent requests we receive to provide more structural support.

Our key development priorities typically fall into three areas: Development of new, and restoration and repair of existing, courts; recruitment and training of Professionals; participation, and in particular attracting, inspiring and retaining younger players.

The generosity of historic donors and Benefactors has allowed the Association to make significant contributions to both new build (Wellington/Tonbridge) and repair/improvement projects (too numerous to mention individually!) that have greatly enhanced the playing opportunities and experience for T&RA members across the country. The T&RA has also been able to support LED lighting projects across much of the UK. In the past decade such payments total approximately £750,000 and include recently awarded grants to Harrow, Moreton Morrell and Jesmond Dene for significant structural repairs. There will continue to be more demands!

Equally importantly, it is critical that Real Tennis players enjoy the support and capabilities of a skilled and inspirational set of Professionals who are able to draw new players into the game and inspire both young and old. The T&RA is underwriting a programme to subsidise the training of young Professionals so that the next generation can be as fortunate as many of us have been, to be taught by great coaches and players.

The T&RA is actively encouraging youth participation in Real Tennis through tourna-

ments, awards and tailored training programmes, as well as by annual funding of the Dedanists' Foundation. In our game only one of the top four Under 18's is British and the 2017 Under 18 British title was won by an American, who beat a French boy. We need to do better at attracting top talent.

The benefits of becoming a Benefactor include all the regular benefits of being a member of the T&RA together with recognition in the Annual Report and on the website, priority booking of tickets for major events and an annual Benefactors' cocktail party. In addition, you will receive the Benefactor's tie, or brooch for the ladies, on joining. Becoming a Benefactor is a wonderful way to contribute to the future prosperity of the game.

If you are a higher rate taxpayer you will be able to claim gift aid on your payments, other than in your first year as a Benefactor where, due to the gift of a tie or brooch on joining the scheme, your benefits exceed the HMRC allowance. If you are willing to become a Benefactor and contribute a minimum of £300 per annum (including your annual club subscription), please contact Fred Satow or Andrina Webb, Membership Secretary, at the T&RA's office at Queen's.



Sad about the boy: the faces of spectators in the Hazard Gallery say it all

set **6-1**. The storm clouds were gathering.

The second set opened tightly, with Steve going 2-0 up but Chris playing a stunning grille shot to pull back 2-1, then 2-2 – the first time he had won two games in a row. The decibel levels rose, then fell as Steve took the next four games, helped by some stunning forces to the dedans, and closed out **6-2**.

The third set was a nail-biter. Steve, now beginning to slow down the service changes and dictate the game at his pace, steam-rolled to a 5-2 advantage with some sublime tennis. Chris, showing the true metal of the man, dug deeper, won another two games in succession to pull it back to 5-4, helped by increasingly hysterical support from the hazard galleries. It was not to be: Steve seemed equal to everything Chris could throw at him and won the third **6-4**.

The fourth set, played to an increasingly funereal atmosphere from the dedans, went the way of the first three, with Steve – racing to a 3-0 advantage by way of the winning gallery – able to find last gallery and hence service change seemingly at will. A couple of railroad aces by Chris came too late to halt what seemed an unstoppable Steve as he won the fourth **6-2**.

With four sets won and the game firmly under control it was little surprise that Steve elected to immediately play a fifth and deciding set, avoiding the (almost fully booked) second day of play on Saturday and causing RTC's financial guru briefly to consider ritual seppuku.

It could have been a walkover, but with both players still running on full-throttle the fifth set still produced some great tennis – and a result that had long seemed inevitable: **6-3** set and match to Steve.

Chris, shell-shocked but still standing, could only applaud what had been a Virgona masterclass on the night. It was not the result RTC had wanted, but real tennis is a cruel game at times. One thing is certain: he'll be back...

The game was expertly marked by Adam Phillips, assisted by referee Dan Jones of Wellington. Commentary was anchored by Ged Eden, with stints on the mic from Craig Greenhalgh, Lachie Deuchar and others. Thanks to the organising team of Owen Saunders, Nick Wood, Paul Newton, Phil Dunn, Katy Doy, Peter Mather and Giles Doy. Giles

and Peter, with Oliver Buckley, led the streaming online, putting in place a great system we can use in future for matches and for training and lessons.

In the other Eliminators Rob Fahey beat Bryn Sayers 5-2 at Queen's and then beat Steve 3-1 in Chicago and 3-0 in Prested, so has progressed to the final against Camden Riviere at Queen's in April.

Report: Andy Anderson. Front cover picture and match pictures by Tim Edwards



Still up for it: Chris battled to the last

The wizard of Oz

Josh Smith of RTC has been to a land down under. Here's his story...

In the autumn of 2017 I enjoyed a six-week trip to the topsy-turvy land of thongs, rippers and bun-yips - it sounds exciting and indeed it was! In a joint initiative between RTC and Royal Melbourne Tennis Court (RMTC), professional John Woods-Casey and I swapped roles, giving John experience of our wonderful club and giving me the opportunity to learn from, and experience, what Melbourne and the other Australian clubs have to offer.

First, a huge thank-you to the Professional team and Board of RTC, the Professional Development fund, and the Professional staff and board at RMTC. I am massively grateful to all of them for the opportunity. I intended to grab with both hands everything I could to improve my own tennis and professionalism, and also to bring things back that could benefit RTC. Thanks also to John and his parents for opening their home to me. I am so fortunate to play such a wonderful sport!

Three categories seemed to orchestrate my activities: tennis and RMTC, the city of Melbourne, and my travels through the south-east corner of Australia. I was determined to make use of every minute, to listen to every person and to learn all I could – like the proverbial sponge, I was ready to soak it all in!

The club at Melbourne is very different to RTC. While I would class RTC as a “court”, RMTC has an amazing complex of two Real Tennis courts, a squash court, gym and swimming pool, large seating areas both inside and out – it's a real Real Tennis “club”. The wealth of facilities brings obvious benefits to the membership. As for my own tennis, and as a base to train for

four weeks, I could not have asked for more.

If the facilities are the building blocks, the professional staff and board are the glue that keeps it all together. Frank Fillipelli, Jonathan Howell and Kate Leeming are recognised names in our sport but I met them for my first time during this trip and - with Scott Girvan (Assistant Pro) - the professionals were a



A koala bear

joy to work with. To say that they had a positive impact on my trip would be a wild understatement - I am truly grateful.

Melbourne's social functions are famed amongst the game and the club is a hive of activity. The grand entrance with the honours boards draws you in, the history of the club and sport is there for all to see, encouraging you to step onto the court. I was lucky enough to learn from some of the great players in the city: I was guided by Frankie, supported by Jonners, rallied into oblivion by Julian Snow and cut down to size by Mike Hap-pell. I loved every minute of court time, so ‘thank you’ to the club and membership for that. Thanks also to Mike Lindell and Richard Allen - I brought home some of Mike's (Mikko) wonderful sketches, which you may see on a club wall near you, and to Richard for his generous advice about my two-week ‘walkabout’ prior to returning home.

I learnt a lot during my time at Melbourne and am very keen to see if we can introduce things at RTC that will benefit both club and membership. Ask me and I would be delighted to explain!

Visits to Ballarat and Hobart complemented my time in Melbourne. Ballarat was an adventure into Australia's recent personal-ity - a gold rush town outside Melbourne with a quiet club that mirrors the town itself; the unassuming road and surrounds do not give away the value found within. In Hobart, I was guided by Graham Hyland, a man I owe a great deal to. Between fighting through the bush to his home (equipped with snake sticks!) to early morning journeys to find



Josh Smith

champion trees (not to mention the tennis), Graham looked after me superbly. His generosity was unbounded and I am incredibly grateful.

A friend once told me that experience is the only tool that you can carry with you anywhere, and I was determined to experience everything during my two-week window of travel time in Australia. Melbourne is the cultural and sporting capital of Australia, is wonderfully culturally diverse and truly sports mad. It is a cosmopolitan, eclectic mix of people from all walks of life, from all over the world - and the food is delicious! Artwork abounds; walls of colourful murals and graffiti show the city's vibrancy

and personality. Art here is supported and the artists are free to splash colour across the city.

Colour and its changing moods gave distinct personalities to the wide variety of environments that Zelda (our adventurously-named home and transport for 13 days) carried us through during our 3,000 km escapade, taking the scenic route from Melbourne to Brisbane.

The temperate rainforests around Melbourne streamed with cool, fresh water; the teal and greens of South Victoria gave way to a white and silver as we drove over The Great Dividing Range. From the snow-capped mountains we headed inland through dry grasslands before reaching the sandy signs of Australia's interior, reds, yellows and gold radiant in the sun-baked land.

Here came a personal highlight: far from the crowds of Melbourne was a harsh, natural landscape that produces tough and hardy people, animals and plants alike. Parched, we headed east on the long drive to the Pacific Ocean. Here the opal and sapphire water was inviting – apart from the bright purple jellyfish that dotted some beaches.

Further north bright green predominated; subtropical rainforest hosts an incredible variety of life. I am proud to be a dendrophile...and I wanted to see as many of Australia's remarkable trees as possible. Dotted on the map, they determined much of the route as we drove our way around the country to find them. Some were Mother Nature's giants – and standing in the shadow of Australia's tallest trees put things into perspective. I have returned to RTC inspired, energised – and driven!

An awayday to Grays

Some time ago an intrepid band of RTC members set off from Hampton Court to drive to Cambridge. Our purpose was primarily to visit the Grays factory to see how their tennis racquets are made, but also to enjoy some tennis on the Cambridge University Real Tennis court.

The adventurous members were Ian Wimbush, Tony Cooke, Nick Edwards, Alan Dallamore, David Best and Nick Carew Hunt. Leading us was our enthusiastic head professional Nick Wood.

After being warmly welcomed by Cambridge professional Kees Ludekens and his team we settled into a couple of hours of competitive doubles before Nick took us to the village of Coton, four miles from the centre of Cambridge, where Grays is located. Grays of Cambridge is now a large company that specialises in making cricket bats, hockey sticks and Gilbert rugby balls, but these are made at their main factory in Kent; only tennis and rackets racquets are made in their small factory at Coton. As we walked towards the factory we passed an old open-sided barn full

of ash planks stacked high waiting to be seasoned and transformed into racquets. At the entrance we were greeted by Martin the manager who explained the process.

First we were shown how the ash planks are sawn into strips to create the racquet head, how the han-



dles and throats are made (of willow) and how vulcanised paper is inserted between the wood strips to strengthen the racquet. All components are then fitted into a clamping device which shapes the racquet, glued together, and baked in an oven.

Next they are sanded down by varying degrees to provide the customer with a choice of racquet weight. To enable the string holes to be drilled in the head the

racquets are fitted into a jig, which is rotated by hand as each hole is drilled by wonderful old foot-operated drilling machines.

Each hole is then countersunk. Subsequently grooves are cut between the holes to sink the strings into the head where they would be vulnerable to damage if the racquet is smashed against court walls or floor.

Another process rounds off these grooves to prevent sharp edges cutting into the strings. Some handles are rounded off, others are left square to cater for personal preference. The racquets are then buffed up before being painted and club logos added.

The entire process is carried out by hand as it has been for centuries - absolutely nothing is automated.

We were full of admiration for the skills of the craftsmen who had made our visit so enjoyable, one of whom proudly told us that he had worked there for 53 years!

We were also grateful to Nick for organising a great day, more of which are planned.

David Best

Obituary - Brian Cecil Rich, 19th April 1928— 17th December 2017

Long-term RTC member Brian Rich has died at the age of 89 following a long illness.

Brian was an orthodontist in Haslemere and took up Real Tennis after many years as a squash player. He was once Chairman of Chichester Tennis and Squash Club.

His playing record is hugely impressive. At The Royal Tennis Court he achieved success in many club competitions. He also won the World Over 60s Singles in 1989 and 1992; and the World Over 60s Doubles in 1990 and 1992.

In addition he was British Over 60s Doubles Champion in 1990 and 1992; British Over 70s Singles Champion in 2000 and 2003; and British Over 70s Doubles Champion in 2000 and 2002.

He has worldwide recognition for his enormous contribution as an historian to Tennis. The sum of his Tennis knowledge was published in a major book called "Disturb'd with Chaces", co-authored with RTC's David Best.

Our thoughts and condolences go out to his family.

Obituary - Tom Mayhew, 27th March 1946 - 12th February 2018

We are sad to announce that Tom Mayhew died recently aged 71.

Tom visited the Royal Tennis Court on a regular basis, and was regarded by all as a wonderfully kind and gentle man.

He very much loved Hampton Court Palace and would often walk in the gardens with his wife, Alex, to whom we send our thoughts and condolences.

Pol Roger: MCC bursts our bubble

In a change to tradition, the RTC Pol Roger Trophy team didn't play Queen's away in the first round. Instead we played host to a team from Manchester in the middle of December – the Manchester team having brought snow with them on their trip south. RTC were without Peter Wright due to a shoulder injury so this wasn't going to be easy.

First up was the second doubles – the two Davids, Watson and Blizzard for RTC vs Mark Seymour-Mead and Guy Adams. The first set was fairly comfortable for the home team, the second was more worrisome as the Manchester pair reached 5-3, but a few games with fewer unforced errors saw the Davids emerge 6-2, 6-5 victors.

In the first singles Phil Dunn was outclassed by Robert Shenkman 6-1, 6-1. The second singles pitched two (at times) volatile players against each other – for Manchester Alex Duncliffe-Vines and for RTC Tom Freeman. After a tight first set went his way, AD-V continued to put pressure on Tom and won the second set.

Then came the crucial third singles. Step up James Watson for RTC against Manchester Captain Simon Shenkman. With James not playing much at the moment and Simon trying to clinch the tie this was close. James snuck the first set 6-5, but lost the second 2-6. In the third James played some fantastic tennis and won the set 6-1.

The score was 2-2 with all resting on the first doubles. For RTC, James Sohl and Simon Barker played Manchester's Adam Holloway and Jamie Bebb. The home pair took a couple of games to get going but didn't lose another game from 0-2 in the first set – so an RTC victory 3-2.

In the semi-final, RTC travelled to Cambridge for another close contest. Buoyed by the return of Peter Wright at first singles, RTC got off to a great start when David and James Watson beat Jimmy Cambell and Jules Camp 6-1, 6-2. Peter had a tougher opponent in the form of Ed Kay who hadn't lost a competitive match on the Cambridge blue court for several years. That streak continued although Peter made him work for it, with Ed

winning 6-3, 6-3 leaving the match all square.

In the second singles Phil Dunn faced Alex Evans – Ed's regular hitting partner. Phil was solid and held on to win 6-3. At 3-3 in the second set the Cambridge Blue court was declared unplayable owing to condensation, so play was shifted to the Green Court. Phil kept his head and won the three games needed to give RTC a 2-1 lead.

RTC were hopeful that Tom Freeman could overcome Matt Shaw in the third singles and clinch the tie, but this was not to be as Matt was too consistent which, coupled with excellent retrieving, gave Tom few chances. Matt won in two easy sets leaving the tie at 2-2 with second doubles to play.

Yet again it was James Sohl and Simon Barker for RTC, this time facing a combination of youth (Ed Hyde) and experience (Duncan Colquhoun). Ed's relative lack of doubles experience showed in the first set as he gave the Sohlman too many balls in the air – RTC won that set 6-3. In the second set, the Cambridge pair swapped things round with Duncan playing more at the back of the court. This proved effective as they were much more competitive getting to 5-5, but in the final game the RTC pair were again solid and won 3-2 overall.

The Final of the Pol was held at Moreton Morrell (so that there would be no home court advantage) against a potentially very strong MCC side who had swept into the final for the loss of only one rubber, and that through injury. A reshuffle of the RTC team line-up was in order to provide the chance of victory.

In the second doubles RTC's Phil Dunn and James Sohl faced former World Doubles finalist Neil Roxburgh and Peter Jarvis. While the latter had both been single figure players in the past, their lack of match play was evident as a steady performance from the RTC pair gave them a 6-2, 3-0 lead. After an injury break to stick the Sohlman's thumb back together, the MCC team took advantage to lead 5-3 in the second set. Phil and James steadied and worked their way back to 5-5 and then won the second set and the match.

The first singles was somewhat one-sided, pitching RTC's James Watson (just back from skiing) against former Amateur Doubles champion Jamie Douglas. In the first set James had a few game points but couldn't capitalise so 6-0 to MCC. The second set saw James take advantage of a few game points but Jamie won at a canter 6-3, 1-1 on the day.

Second singles pitched Tom Freeman against Jamie Giddins. While there was on paper a 10-point gap between the players, Tom played the best tennis any of us had seen from him and was calm (!) and competitive throughout. Jamie was just that little bit too strong and won 6-3, 6-5 having saved a set point against him with a lucky retrieve that went through the rafters.

Third singles and RTC needed to win to stay in the match. Up stepped David Watson to face Horatio Cary. RTC were hopeful that Horatio would forget to bring shoes, or a racquet, or to turn up at all but it was not to be – Horatio was focused and steamrolled the first set 6-0. David re-grouped and the match was much more even up to 4-4 in the second, when Horatio eased away for a 6-4 win giving MCC the Pol Roger Trophy.

The dead-rubber First Doubles looked potentially tricky on paper pitching Simon Barker and Peter Wright for RTC against William Maltby and James Acheson-Gray – however the RTC pair were simply too good with Peter effortlessly patrolling the back of the court with Simon dealing with the few volleys that came his way. 6-2, 6-2 to RTC but a 2-3 loss on the day.

Given that the worst player out of the 14 on court at Moreton was a lowly 20 handicap, it was a day filled with quality tennis. We thank Moreton for hosting the match and providing an excellent lunch, Tom Granville for marking faultlessly all day and congratulate MCC on their win – there's no shame in losing 2-3 to a team of that quality. Bring on the 2019 season!

Phil Dunn

Congratulations to Doug Sheperdigian and John Leach for winning the Eliminator Handicap Doubles tournament, which was held the day before the Chapman/Virgona World Eliminator match at Hampton Court. The pair beat Nick Jeffery and Graeme Marks in the final. Doug and John received a bottle of Pol Roger champagne and a Gold Leaf racquet, presented by Steve Virgona. A big thank-you to everyone who took part, there was some fantastic handicap doubles play on show.



Lunar tunes: January's 'super blue blood' moon looms over our court



Anne Boleyn (aka Nicola Doble) won 9-5 in the RTC Christmas fancy dress handicap challenge. Special thanks go to Chris Chapman for being such a sport on the day.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

April 5-8: Cherry Blossom Doubles Tournament, Washington DC

Saturday May 12: Chairman's Event Pub Quiz

Sunday May 13: Annual General Meeting, plus Barker Camm Trophy and Harris Watson finals

June 28—July 1: King's Goblet Open Handicap Doubles

July 16-22: Champions Trophy 2018

