

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2024

2024 marked the end of an era for British tennis with the retirement of Andy Murray. Local fans had been lucky to have the opportunity to see him in action when he won his last ever title here in Nottingham at last year's Rothesay Nottingham Open. His partnership with Dan Evans at the Paris Olympics in the summer provided a fitting end to his career and, though they didn't win a medal, they did reach the quarter-finals in dramatic fashion, saving an incredible five consecutive match points against Japan and two match points against Belgium.

Dan Evans was competing in his 26th Davis Cup tie for Great Britain in Manchester in September and Nottingham born, Billy Harris, in his first. Leon Smith called Harris's win over Finland's Otto Virtanen, "one of the best debuts you'll have seen. It was that good." Harris has had a great year, reaching his first ATP semi-final in Eastbourne and an ATP quarter-final at Queen's. He reached the semi-finals at the Rothesay Nottingham Open, cheered on by a band of local supporters, including his childhood coach Dawn Maskill. Ranked 201 in the world at the end of 2023, he attained a career-high ranking of 101 in September.

Freya Christie increased her career total of doubles titles to twenty-three with wins in Grenoble, Roehampton and Glasgow. She also reached doubles finals in Andrézieux-Bouthéon and Oldenzaal. Last month in Loughborough, she reached the semi-final partnering her Nottinghamshire team-mate, Amelia Rajecki.

Millie Rajecki completed her senior year at North Carolina State University in a blaze of glory. Named the Intercollegiate Tennis Association National Senior Player of the Year, she is the highest ranked women's tennis player in the NC State's tennis programme's history, finishing the season the number 2 ranked college player in the USA. She is also only the third player to win both 100 singles matches, and 100 doubles matches for NC State, better known as the Wolfpack.

Since graduating from college, she has already won two doubles titles, in Nottingham and Shrewsbury, and reached a singles final in Trnava, Slovakia, which went to three sets. Millie also brought some of that Wolfpack team spirit

to this summer's County Cup, earning her a place in the '15-15 Club' by winning 15/15 rubbers played for the Nottinghamshire Women's Team.

Phoenix Weir, now beginning his own tennis journey on the senior tour, and Dominic West made a similar contribution to the Men's Team in the summer, winning 12 out of 13 rubbers, making them the highest ranked players of the 52 in their group. Dominic's world ranking in doubles has risen nearly 600 places this year and in September he reached an ITF World Tennis Tour final in Cap d'Agde, France, partnering team-mate Marcus Walters. Marcus also reached doubles finals in Monastir in Tunisia, and Glasgow and has achieved a similar rise in his world doubles ranking – he has also risen from 1983 to 1145 in singles.

On the junior tour, Mia Wainwright has won singles titles in Liverpool and Newport and was a finalist in Loughborough. She also won doubles titles in Newport and Loughborough and last month reached a final in Liverpool.

Mia joined Freya Christie and Amelia Rajecki for the Summer County Cup in Wimbledon, alongside Annabel Bird, Anna Buckley, Emily Crowe, Isabella Smillie, Jessica Spencer, Livvy Tomkins and Millie Wileman. Captained by Georgia Lawson, the team put in a valiant effort and narrowly missed out on promotion back to Group One, finishing third. They beat Derbyshire, Cheshire, Avon and Leicestershire and we are grateful to all of them and especially Georgia for taking over the team last winter.

The Men's Team, promoted last year, were in Cromer. Determined to build on that success, they beat Durham & Cleveland, Norfolk, Lancashire, Berkshire and Leicestershire to win promotion to Group Three. Congratulations to Jamie Crowfoot, Patrick Foley, Andrew Higham, Eban Straker-Meads, Marcus Walters, Phoenix Weir, Dominic West and Daniel Wright and to joint captains Ben Mactaggart and Philip Peters.

In the Winter County Cup, both teams finished as runners-up in their groups. The Women's Team, joined in Nottingham by Sophie Lager and Sarah Wright, beat Derbyshire and Buckinghamshire. The Men's Team, joined in Exeter by Jeremy Moser, Mateo Purcaru and Carl Saxby, beat Norfolk and Devon.

The 18U Boys were also very successful, winning promotion in Wrexham in March by beating North Wales, the Channel Islands and Bedfordshire. With many 16-year-olds in the team, we have high hopes for them next year. The 14U Boys playing in Grantham and the 12U Boys in Northumberland also

topped their groups. Not far behind were the 12U Girls, the 10U Boys and Girls and the 9U Boys and Girls, who were all second in their respective groups. Congratulations to all of them.

All our county teams are sponsored by Brenntag. We are grateful to them and to all our young players and their parents and supporters and to all the Junior team captains: Ruth Allery, Zef Antonio, Hannah Gale, Charlie Gibson, Connor Johnson, Carl Saxby, Jessica Spencer, Jane Stokes, Sarah Usher, Alastair Weir, Daniel Wright and Sarah Wright.

Our junior teams' results reflect the strength of our county coaching programme managed by Alastair Weir, our County Performance Coordinator. We have managed to reduce the cost of training sessions, ensuring inclusivity without compromising quality, and Alastair has worked hard to increase the number of participants benefiting from county training so that there is a broader base of players coming through.

Inevitably the best players are picked for the team, but it is important to give the other players competition opportunities and the experience of playing for the county. On the finals weekend of the Rothesay Nottingham Open at the Tennis Centre, Andy Bradley, assisted by Jane Stokes, organised a 10U and 12U Three Counties Challenger competition with neighbouring Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. (It had been planned as a Four Counties Challenger, but Derbyshire pulled out). Over 30 players took part and Sandi Procter, President of the LTA, handed out medals to all the participants. The event was a great success and was enjoyed by all.

Earlier in the week, Sandi joined us for our annual Club Chairs meeting, which was very well attended with representatives from 24 of our clubs. Our guests were able to enjoy some very exciting matches before getting the opportunity over tea to talk to Sandi, Simon Spalter, from the Tennis Volunteer Community group, and most importantly to talk to each other. It was also an opportunity for the clubs to meet Kate King, who had joined us in April, in the newly created role of County Liaison Officer.

We are delighted to have Kate on board. Her previous experience of working for the LTA for many years on regional projects and her outstanding knowledge of all things tennis will be of great value to us. The clubs will already be aware of her regular and informative communications, and she is the person to contact if you need to know anything about tennis in the county.

In terms of communication, our social media coverage is now very impressive, thanks to our Social Media Coordinator, Ade Bates. Do keep sharing your successes and club news with him and Kate.

For the second year running, there were British winners in both events at the Rothesay Nottingham Open. Katie Boulter retained her title after coming from a set down to beat Emma Raducanu in the semi-final earlier in the day. Qualifier, Jacob Fearnley won the men's title. Clearly suited to the Nottingham grass – he won the doubles title here last year – Fearnley, like Millie Rajecki, is a recent graduate of the American college system. While Millie played for NC State's Wolfpack, Jake played for Texas Christian University's Horned Frogs.

During the play on the grass courts, local Coaches and Assistants were running sessions in the Schools Zone. Over the course of the week, over 2000 children came to the tournament not only to watch tennis, but to try it out, in many cases for the very first time.

69 of our youngest players competed enthusiastically in the Winter Mini League and 79 in the Summer League, up from 45 in the previous summer. Red ball players from Nottingham Tennis Centre topped the 8U Division 1 and David Lloyd Nottingham were the champions of 8U Division 2. The winner of the 9U league for the second consecutive year was West Bridgford Tennis Club, who were unbeaten all season.

West Bridgford Tennis Club also had a clean sweep in the Summer League, retaining the 9U title, again unbeaten all season, and topping 8U Division 1. Nottingham Tennis Centre and Lady Bay Tennis Club finished second in the 8U by one point, while Caunton Tennis Club were runners up in the 9U, losing out in a narrow defeat to the eventual champions on the final day of the season.

The centralised fixtures for the Mini League are hosted by Nottingham Trent University Tennis Centre and it would not function without the contribution of the young tennis leaders from West Bridgford Tennis Club and the students from Nottingham Trent University, all aspiring coaches, competition organisers and tennis officials. We are very grateful to them, to the Nottinghamshire clubs that support the Leagues, the Team Captains for their commitment and especially to Harrison Fernandez Lewis, Nottinghamshire LTA Mini League Organiser.

The Nottinghamshire Mini Leagues have been sponsored for a number of years by RWB Chartered Accountants. We were very pleased that Richard Bonnello

from RWB was able to join us for the 2023 Notts LTA Tennis Awards Night in March. This event has been held at the Nottingham High School for several years and has proved very popular. It is not only an opportunity to award outstanding achievement in tennis, but also to celebrate all the tennis activity in the county on an annual basis.

Anna McBride picked up the Notts LTA Special Achievement Award for winning both the Women's Singles and Doubles titles in the People with Intellectual Impairments Finals in Melbourne in both 2023 and 2024. In January in Melbourne, Anna, a member of our Great Britain Learning Disability National Squad, reinforced her world No.1 spot in the Virtus World Rankings. In September in Annecy in the Virtus World Tennis Championships, Anna won two gold medals, one in the singles and the second in mixed doubles, partnering Dominic Iannotti.

Martha Harris from Bingham is currently playing wheelchair tennis in the Adapted Athletics programme at the University of Alabama. She won a singles title at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden Wheelchair Championships in January and doubles titles in April in Markham, Canada (partnering Laura Goodkind) and in September in Sacramento, California (partnering Maylee Phelps).

Tennis is for everybody, and Susan Allan has worked energetically to ensure that EDI is embedded in all that we do as a county and that clubs are supported in their own EDI initiatives. Keyworth & District Lawn Tennis Club organised a very popular Inclusive Tennis event and several clubs held Open Days to reach out to their local communities. Susan has sadly stepped down as our first lead Inclusion and Diversity Officer and we are very grateful for her hard work and her dedication in the role.

Susan and I joined Dan Evans and Toni Flanders, the LTA'S Parks Investment Delivery Partner, in June for the grand opening of the refurbished park courts at Clifton Playing Fields. Other parks in Nottingham being transformed are Strelley Recreation Ground, Bulwell Forest Recreation Ground and Lenton Abbey Park.

The LTA's Parks Tennis Project and Ashfield District Council funded the refurbished courts at Sutton Lawn Tennis Club in Sutton in Ashfield, which were officially opened in August. When so many public facilities are being cut back, it is encouraging to see a local council prioritising tennis and recognising its benefits.

As I said last year, one barrier to participation that does not exist in tennis is age. Izzy Bramhall became the Over 55 World Racketlon (table tennis, squash, badminton and tennis) champion, also winning team gold for the GB 45 team in Rotterdam. Ann Brown won a bronze medal partnering Diana Smith in the Over 70 Women's Doubles in the ITF World Tennis Masters Tour World Championships in Turkey. Also, in Turkey in the European Masters Club Championships, West Bridgford's team, Tony Alexander, Russ Blenkinsopp, Tony King and Peter Whitehead won bronze, in the Over 65 event.

Both our Ladies Over 35 County Cup team and our Seniors Ladies Over 40 team were promoted, the latter to Division 1. We congratulate them and their respective captains Sarah Wright and Maia Dunn.

The other Senior Ladies had more mixed fortunes. The Over 65s had a difficult season after losing their top singles player, Ann Brown, at the beginning of April with a serious injury. However, the Over 50s did well to keep their place in Division 1a and the Over 55s were pleased to finish third in their group. The Over 60s also finished third, rounding off the season with a dramatic win by a match tiebreaker 18/16 in Stratford-upon-Avon during weather worthy of *The Tempest* - sun, hale, thunderstorms and torrential rain. Fortunately, they were playing in a bubble.

The most successful Senior Men's team was the Over 65s captained by Andy Bradley, who topped their group by beating Leicestershire, North Wales and Northumberland. The Over 45s, a team only formed three years ago and captained by Jason Revill, were promoted last year and this year finished a close second in Division 1, a great achievement. Both the Over 50s and the Over 60s, captained respectively by Richard Dickens and Russell Blenkinsop, also finished second in their divisions. Our oldest team, the Over 75s, did beat Herefordshire & Worcestershire, but they were hampered by injuries. Nevertheless, they are all "still standing" (if not always running about so much).

Our thanks to all of them and to the other captains and their teams: Kate Beaumont, Richard Brannan, Janak Gunatilleke, Lisa Knowles, Renee Parker, Paula Parkinson, Jill Shelvey, Nick Shelvey and David Watkins. We are especially grateful to Tim Phillips and Jill Shelvey for organising the Senior County teams.

We are also very grateful to Margaret Cobb and her committee for organising and administering the Notts LTA Leagues. The clubs voted to try a new format

for matches this summer, which has seemed generally popular. The winter league is up and running and the new tournament software, which is now being rolled out, seems much more user friendly and informative.

Andy Bradley, our Men's Over 65 captain, has also been our LTA Councillor for the past eight years. He is now stepping down and Nick Bonello, who has been looking after our finances very efficiently since Chris Cobb retired, will be taking over the role and we wish him all the best.

Andy has been a very conscientious contributor to the national LTA conversation on behalf of our county and has always kept us fully informed of LTA initiatives, developments and policy making. We are grateful to him for his hard work and the investment of his time in this important position.

Andy continues to be responsible for the County Championships, which have evolved under his stewardship from the old Junior County Closed. The amount of work that this involves every year should not be underestimated. By introducing more events and playing opportunities to increase competitive participation, he has not shirked from making his job harder. Dealing with the competing demands of players and parents, while constantly being at the mercy of the British weather, is not for the faint-hearted.

Andy is ever reliable and unflappable and always delivers a very successful tournament. Next year's will be his last. Voluntary service like this should never be taken for granted.

This year's Nottinghamshire County Championships, supported by Stratstone Jaguar Land Rover Nottingham, were particularly successful. All the events were held at West Bridgford Tennis Club, except for the Men's and Women's Doubles held at the County Ground on the last day.

Evie Pritchard, who had recently won the 11U Doubles title with Coco Witton at the Lexus Junior National Championships in Nottingham, picked up four county titles – the 16U Singles, the 14U Singles and Doubles, with Mia Silveston-Lin, and the Women's Doubles, with Sarah Wright.

Sarah Wright won the Mixed Doubles with Thomas Pritchard, who also won the Men's Doubles with Andrew Higham and the 16U Boys Doubles with Oliver Melady, who also won the 16U Boys Singles.

Rebeka Hodi won the 18U Girls Singles and the 18U Girls Doubles with Isabel Smillie, who won the Women's Singles. Benjamin Phillips won the Men's Singles

and the 18U Boys Singles. Imogen Drummond won the 10U Girls Singles and the 11U Girls Singles. Henry Anderson won the 12U Boys Singles and the 12U Boys Doubles with Kai Yao Yung. Sofia Walton won the 12U Girls Singles and the 12U Girls Doubles with Alice Biggin. Ethan Nayembil won the 9U Boys Singles and the 9U Doubles with Zac Kurien, who won the 8U Singles.

Other Singles titles were won by Faye Bryning (9U Girls), Demir Cicek (10U Boys), Aarush Gouni (11U Boys) and Kieran Yu (14U Boys). The Doubles winners were Michael Newbury & Lachlan Slane (10U Mixed), James Beale & Joshua Yard (14U Boys), Tallulah Butterfield & Millie Webster (16U Girls) and Benjamin Avery & Elijah Killen Smith (18U Boys).

Our thanks of course to Andy and his team and to Jill Shelvey, who ran all the mini tennis events. The staff at West Bridgford Tennis Club were very welcoming and helpful and the food was excellent.

Peter Dion, a Life Member of West Bridgford Tennis Club, sadly died in February aged 92. He had been involved with Notts LTA for over sixty years and remained one of our trustees. He was the Chairman of the Ground Committee for over thirty years and served on several other NLTA committees, including the County Closed Championships. His enormous contribution to Nottinghamshire tennis will never be forgotten. In 2006 he received a Meritorious Service Award from the LTA.

A much younger and more recent member of our Management Committee died in June. Edward Benson had been a highly respected and committed Club Representative until ill-health forced him to step down prematurely. He was passionate and very knowledgeable about all aspects of tennis and was an outstanding volunteer for Magdala Lawn Tennis Club, which was recognised by a Notts LTA Lifetime Achievement Award. With the best backhand in the club, he selflessly coached their young members at all levels, ran many different teams and as Chairman helped to keep the club afloat.

People just like Edward were the pioneers, who founded our tennis clubs, built them up and helped them to grow. Magdala will miss him.

Last week Sandi Procter, the LTA President, congratulated Sue Clague and her team for reaching the LTA's 100% Governance Framework compliance target with a "herculean effort" in the last few weeks to get Notts LTA over the line. This has been a huge piece of work over the last 11 months, and we are among the first counties to achieve this. All our policies have been updated,

particularly Safeguarding, and Jonathon Little, County Safeguarding Officer, has made a significant contribution to this task.

We had assumed that the “nine-year rule” limiting the amount of time an individual could serve on the Board would only apply from the date of Notts LTA Ltd.’s incorporation, but we were wrong. This has meant that many long-serving volunteers have had to step down or take a back seat.

Rick Britton has been on the Management Committee for nearly 30 years – 20 years too long in new money – and in that time has made a real difference to tennis in the county. Rick is virtually synonymous with this organisation, and he never misses the chance to turn any situation or opportunity to our advantage. He is responsible for raising over half a million pounds in his role as our Sponsorship Chair and that fact alone has sustained the bulk of our activities, not to mention the financial security of our entire operation. That many of our generous sponsors have been so loyal in their support for us is testament to Rick’s commitment and care.

Rick may no longer sit on the Board, but he will continue to play for the team.

According to Barbra Streisand, “People who need people, are the luckiest people in the world”. We must be extremely lucky as we certainly need people. There are gaps to be filled on the sub-committees in our new organisational structure. If you would like to join us to contribute in any small way to growing the game, please do get in touch. This need not involve a lot of your time or a lot of work. Tesco’s slogan may not be very grammatical, but it is certainly accurate – Every Little Helps!

I began this by mentioning the achievements of Novak Djokovic’s new coach, Andy Murray. I was very lucky to be on Centre Court on both occasions when Andy won Wimbledon. The first time I saw him on a tennis court, he was about nine years old in a tournament at the Solihull Arden Club – a junior tournament at a grass roots club run by dedicated volunteers. People like Edward Benson. The kind of people we all need.

I salute all the volunteers in all our clubs and places to play and all the volunteers in the county. Thank you for 2024.

Good luck for 2025

Christopher Walker