

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2023

The Davis Cup Finals Group stage in Manchester in September was recently named Event of the Year at the MCR Active Sports Awards. The sold-out 13,000 AO Arena audience on the Sunday was Great Britain's biggest Davis Cup crowd in its 123-year history in the event. In a thrilling finale, Dan Evans and Neil Skupski saved four match points before beating France to see them through to the final.

Staged out here in the regions, this is exactly the kind of high-level exposure that tennis needs to inspire a new generation of young people to take up the game. Dan Evans has talked about the influence watching Davis Cup matches in Birmingham as a boy had had on him.

Nottingham-born Billy Harris was in the GB team as a hitter and also, according to Jack Draper, is an accomplished off-court darts player. Billy, who was coached as a junior at Caunton by Dawn Maskill, is currently world number 204. He reached the third qualifying round of this year's Wimbledon, and last month lost to Draper in the quarter finals of a Challenger in Bergamo and made the main draw of an ATP Tour competition for the first time in Sofia.

Billy is featured in *Beyond the Baseline*, a new tennis documentary series shining the spotlight on up-and-coming British stars, which also features Freya Christie. Freya, who made a very welcome and unexpected appearance in our own County Championships this summer, reached a career high of 110 in doubles in June and added doubles titles in Sunderland and Grenoble to bring her career total to twenty. She also reached doubles finals in Glasgow, Ljubljana, Bellinzona, Allenkirchen and Tallinn.

Back in February, while my younger son, Nicholas (in his blue Forest shirt), and a tiny group of British supporters were cheering on our Davis Cup team in Bogota – another stunning victory against the odds for Evans and Skupski – Phoenix Weir was also in Colombia. He reached a Junior ITF doubles final in Barranquilla after a doubles semi-final in Ecuador the previous week. The following month he won a doubles title in Loughborough and later reached the second round of the doubles in the Junior Championships at Wimbledon. Phoenix is now taking his first steps on the senior tour and we wish him all the best.

Amelia Rajecki continues to make her mark in North Carolina State University's tennis team where she is the number 3 singles player. They reached the NCAA Division 1 women team's national final for the first time and, though they lost, unseeded Amelia scored the biggest upset of the women's singles event in the individual championships by beating the tournament's number one seed. This October in Tyler, Texas, she won an ITF doubles title with her college team-mate, Abigail Renscheli.

While the members of the Davis Cup team have been making us proud and Jack Draper has shown the future of British men's tennis is in safe hands, there has been much to celebrate in the women's game. This was particularly in evidence at the Rothesay Nottingham Open where for the first time in WTA history, there were four British women in the quarter-final

of a tour event – Katie Boulter, Jodie Burrage, Harriet Dart and Heather Watson. In the first all-British WTA final for 46 years, Leicestershire’s Katie Boulter beat Jodie Burrage to become the third British champion in the Nottingham women’s singles. More recently in the Billie Jean King Cup at the Copper Box Arena, the Brits secured their place in the 2024 Qualifiers.

This year’s Rothesay Nottingham Open received an unexpected boost with the late entry of Andy Murray. Murray’s appearance with his team, including Ivan Lendl, ensured record crowds and increased media interest in the Nottingham event. Although the second half of his tennis year has been frustrating and disappointing, lifting the Nottingham trophy on Father’s Day in front of all his children for the first time in his career has to be a highlight even in his amazing tennis journey. Could Nottingham be his last title?

As in previous years Notts LTA hosted representatives from our clubs at an informal meeting at the Nottingham Open, enabling them to enjoy the tennis and to share their concerns and examples of good practice.

Both the Davis Cup in Manchester and the Rothesay Open in Nottingham provided plenty of opportunities to drive grassroots participation with tennis related activities, giving hundreds of local schoolchildren the chance to watch, play and enjoy the sport, many for the first time. As the LTA increases investment in the facilities at the Nottingham Tennis Centre, we hope that more major events will be coming to the city in the future.

The Tennis Centre is one of four tennis venues across Great Britain to become the first LTA Youth Recognised Venues for adopting and delivering the junior programme to the highest standard. The programme in Nottingham is now one of the biggest in the country with nearly 1300 players weekly. Representatives from each of the venues were invited down to the Tennis Centre during the Rothesay Nottingham Open to showcase their best practices to more than 20 coaches from the local area.

Every member of the Davis Cup team has played a role in their success this year. Life on the road can be a lonely experience for a professional tennis player and Murray and Evans in particular have always made themselves available to represent their country and relished the opportunity to be part of a team. There have been many excellent examples of great team-work and camaraderie in all age groups at club and county level this year.

67 of our youngest players competed enthusiastically in the Winter Mini Tennis Leagues and 45 in the Summer Leagues. The Winter League winners were teams from West Bridgford Tennis Club – 8U - and Nottingham Tennis Centre – 9U. In the summer West Bridgford topped both the 8U and the 9U leagues and Zac Kurien from WBTC deserves a special mention for winning all 8 of his match tiebreaks throughout the season.

The fixtures were played at Nottingham Trent University Tennis Centre and were supported by assistant referees/court supervisors, who included NTU student volunteers interested in coaching/officiating pathways and young tennis leaders from WBTC. Feedback from the Mini Tennis leagues has been overwhelmingly favourable since their re-introduction in Winter 2022 – the parents appreciating the “really friendly, good atmosphere”, which

makes for a positive introduction to match play. We are very grateful to Harrison Fernandez Lewis, Nottinghamshire LTA Mini Tennis Leagues Organiser.

The Mini Tennis Leagues are sponsored by RWB Chartered Accountants. We are indebted to them and to all our other sponsors and our vice-presidents for their continued support. Rick Britton, our Sponsorship Chair, ensures our survival through his sterling work on our behalf.

The Notts LTA Leagues are sponsored by Dunlop and the debate about the best format for matches goes on. A shorter format had been trialled last summer, but there was insufficient support for a permanent change and so this summer the league reverted to 6 sets.

Inevitably some clubs were disappointed, but until a consensus can be reached under the current constitution, we are left with the status quo.

There have been considerable problems with the LTA tournament software and the LTA has closed down the helpline, which has not made their job any easier. Nevertheless, Margaret Cobb and the league committee continue to work hard to keep all the clubs happy. One hot topic this year has been the requirement to play during extreme heat. There has not always been agreement between teams when it is too hot to play. If the climate is indeed changing, we may have to revert to night matches in the summer, but that may not be very popular or very practical. However, there might be a willingness by all clubs to agree to the shorter format.

Our Men's and Ladies County Teams had mixed fortunes this year. The Men won promotion in both the Summer and the Winter County Cups, defeating all the other counties in their groups. In Felixtowe in Group 5 they beat Leicestershire, Devon, North Wales, Staffordshire and Somerset. Last month in Nottingham in Group 5b they beat Shropshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Captained by Ben Mactaggart and Phillip Peters (who both only took over last year), the team were Jamie Crowfoot, Patrick Foley, Andrew Higham, Roy Keegan, Jeremy Moser, Niral Nana, Jamie Praditngam, Mateo Purcara, Carl Saxby, Marcus Walters, Dominic West and Daniel Wright. Our congratulations to all of them.

Last year the Nottinghamshire Ladies won promotion to Group 1 in the Summer County Cup for the first time. Sadly, as we all know, it is tough at the top. In Eastbourne, in spite of their best efforts and great teamwork, they finished bottom of the group and they had a similar result in Group 2b in Bromley last month facing very tough opposition. The team, captained by Sarah Usher and Sarah Wright, consisted of Anna Buckley, Emily Crowe, Lucy Gill, Sophie Lager, Georgia Lawson, Amelia RajECKI, Jessica Spencer, Livvy Tomkins, Mia Wainwright and Millie Wileman.

Having worked extremely hard together over very many years, Sarah Usher and Sarah Wright have decided to step down as the Ladies Captains. Both the Sarahs have made a huge contribution to Nottinghamshire tennis – at our Tennis Awards in March, Sarah Usher received the NLTA Meritorious Service Award and the Notts Ladies were our Team of the Year – and we are very grateful to them. Georgia Lawson, assisted by Livvy Tomkins, stepped up before the Winter County Cup as a temporary measure and we wish them well.

Both county teams and their captains have put in a lot of time and effort both on and off court to represent Nottinghamshire this year and we appreciate their commitment and enthusiasm.

There has been plenty of enthusiasm and commitment on display in our junior county teams. Back in February both the Boys 10U and the Girls 10U made a great start to their year in the annual 12 Counties Championships at Corby Tennis Centre. While the Girls came second in their group, the Boys came top in theirs beating Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire to win promotion to Division 1. Congratulations to Henry Anderson, Max Goodridge, Ethan Shoko and Joseph Welton.

In the County Cup in May the 10U Girls did better, beating Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire to top their group. Well done to Mila Allen, Silvana Dewshi, Star Mkhweli, Evie Pritchard and Sofia Walton.

The 8U Boys came third in their group at Grantham by beating Derbyshire and the 14U Girls came third in their group at Caunton by beating Staffordshire. At the Nottingham Tennis Centre in September, the 12U Girls came third in their group and the 12U Boys came second in theirs.

In the older age groups our most successful team was the 14U Boys who played at a rainy Wrexham in May. Having to deal with staggered start times and rain-interrupted play over the week-end, the boys beat both the home team, North Wales, and Derbyshire and only lost to Lancashire in a gripping match-deciding doubles tie-break. Well done – Elijah Killen Smith, Oliver Melady, Thomas Pritchard, Joshua Yard and Kieran Yu.

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: Zef Antonio, Charlie Gibson, Andy Higham, Jack Large, Carl Saxy, Jane Stokes, Sarah Usher, Alastair Weir and Sarah Wright.

Alastair Weir has joined us as our County Performance Coordinator, taking over from Andy Higham, who made a wonderful contribution to this position over the previous four years. Alastair has brought with him a wealth of experience in performance tennis and he is now developing our county training programme. We were delighted to welcome Alastair at the beginning of the year and wish Andy well as he has now moved temporarily to Australia.

Anna McBride from Nottingham was in Melbourne for the closing weekend of the Australian Open, competing in their first-ever international People with Intellectual Impairments (PwII) and Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHoH) Finals. Top seed, Anna, took both the Women's Singles and the Doubles titles in the PwII event.

Tennis Australia is committed to embracing diversity, by ensuring their sport and events are welcoming, safe and inclusive for everyone. The LTA's Inclusion Strategy is central to its vision of Tennis Opened Up. We have recently appointed Susan Allan as our first lead Inclusion and Diversity Officer for the county. Susan has begun to develop a strategy for us at county level and has already begun gathering information from the clubs. Inclusion &

Diversity is not just a legal requirement, but something that we should be doing anyway and it is actually an advantage for the clubs. Increased participation is good for all of us.

Thanks to Sue Clague's groundwork, which is now being built on by Jonathon Little, our County Safeguarding Officer, all our clubs are compliant with the LTA's safeguarding requirements. In the same way, we all need to take the necessary steps, guided by Susan Allan, to ensure that Inclusion & Diversity is considered and embedded in all that we do at club and county level. Tennis should not only be safe for all, but open to all – always and in all ways.

Unlike most other sports, one barrier to participation that does not exist in tennis is age. Tennis is a game for life. Izzy Bramhall was selected for the Great Britain over 50s squad for the World Championships and she won three World Championship titles in the World Racketlon Championships in August, two of them in the Seniors Mixed O45 and O50 events with Justin Crowther from the Nottingham Castle Club.

In the British Open Masters Indoor Tennis Championships in Wrexham in March, top seeds Ann Brown and Diana Smith won the Women's 65 Doubles title, Maia Dunn and Sarah Wright won the Women's 35 Doubles and Tony Alexander and Peter Whitehead were narrowly defeated in the Men's 65 Doubles final. Tony Alexander had won a 65+ singles title in Glasgow in January and added another 65+ singles title on the grass in Felixtowe in June.

Also in June in the British Open Clay Court Championships in Bournemouth, Ann Brown and Dee Smith were the Women's 65 Doubles champions. Before he left for Australia, Andy Higham was a double champion at Wimbledon in the British Masters Closed Grass Court Championships in August, winning the Men's 30s Singles and the Men's 30s Doubles with Charlie Swallow of Northants.

Both our O35 teams did us proud on the grass in Eastbourne. After a tough couple of years, which had resulted in relegations, the Men's O35 team beat both the Isle of Man and Somerset to secure promotion. John Beaumont, Janak Gunatilleke, Chris Holmes and Justin Revill have been joined by strong newcomers, Jim Trussler and Mike Pettifer, and the team look forward to playing in division 5 next year and hope to continue to recruit new talent.

Having come second last year, the Ladies O35 team beat Shropshire, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire to secure promotion this year. Captained by Sarah Usher, the winning team were Stephanie Barling, Ellie Beale, Caroline Dunn, Maia Dunn and Sarah Wright.

Ann Brown's Ladies O65 team won promotion to Division 1 last year, but like the Ladies County Team found it tough at the top against high standard opponents. However, they were only narrowly beaten by Lancashire, Cheshire and Scotland and Renee Parker deserves a mention for winning all her singles.

Renee's Ladies O60 team secured a win over Cambridgeshire and Paula Parkinson's Ladies O55 team beat Warwickshire. They all particularly enjoyed their road trip to Sunderland to play Durham & Cleveland in spite of the tropical temperatures. For the first time ice towels became an essential part of their on-court equipment.

The Ladies O50 team had a terrific season, finishing second in Division 1A. Before narrowly losing to Cambridgeshire, they had beaten Warwickshire 5-0, Lancashire 5-0 and Herefordshire 5-0. Captained by Lisa Knowles, the team consisted of Kathryn Hales, Elaine Masters and Jackie Thompson with Izzy Bramhall joining them for the Warwickshire match.

The most senior Notts Ladies – the Ladies O70 team - had a very successful season, winning all four matches and promotion to Division 2. They beat Oxfordshire on a very hot summer's day (no ice towels, but a quintessentially English tea – Victoria sandwich with strawberries), Somerset after a long and arduous drive to Taunton and Leicestershire at home. They were disappointed that their final game had to be conceded to them by Cambridgeshire who could only muster two players. Captained by Jill Shelvey, the team was Sue Copestake, Ann Pullan, Sue Reesby and Rosie Watkins.

Our Senior Men's teams had more mixed fortunes. Yet again the most successful was Jason Revill's Men's O45 team – Jonathan Harte, Simon Hawthorne, David Percival and John Sturmey – who won promotion from Division 2a by beating Herefordshire & Worcestershire, Lancashire and Warwickshire. Jason clearly found the whole experience inspiring as he wrote his team report in verse.

After four years in Division 1, the Men's O60 team were relegated, though they did beat Buckinghamshire and Tony Alexander did achieve a memorable win over Leicestershire's Martin Gillam. The Men's O65 team were relegated in 2022 and this year had a new look and a new captain, Andy Bradley. Their first match against a Derbyshire team that included Ashley Broomhead and Keith Reynolds resulted in a loss, but with wins over Cumbria (played in Carlisle) and Northumberland (played at home) they finished 3rd in their group.

The Men's O75 team had had a frustrating season last year, with many matches being cancelled or postponed, but they did finish second in their table. This year, most of their matches were played as scheduled but the results were disappointing. Nick Shelvey said there wasn't any shortage of enthusiasm, but simply not enough players, in the words of Elton John, "still standing". They may not be ready to say "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" just yet – but it is getting steeper.

On the other hand, the Men's O70 team were almost as successful as the O70 Ladies. Under the joint captaincy of Chris Brandon-White and Dave Watkins, David Carter, Alan Philpott, Gerry Radford and John Taylor finished in second position in Division 1, exceeding all their expectations. They had beaten Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hampshire & IOW and were disappointed to lose to a very strong Dorset in the deciding final match in Bournemouth. This was an excellent result, particularly as they had narrowly avoided relegation in 2022.

With our thanks to Tim Phillips, Senior Competitions Organiser, we are grateful to all the Senior County teams and to their captains for their efforts on behalf of the county, both in the county and all over the country. The cost of matches, especially the away fixtures, is very much a talking point and improvements to the format of the competition to alleviate this problem are apparently being considered by Seniors Tennis GB.

Ian McCulloch, an honorary life vice-president of Nottinghamshire LTA, sadly died in April aged 92. He represented Nottinghamshire on the LTA Council from 1985 – 2001 and became an LTA Honorary Life Councillor in 2002. He was also the Nottinghamshire LTA County Secretary for 26 years and was heavily involved in the setting up and the running of the Nottingham Open. Iain and his family were all keen members of Farnsfield Tennis Club before they moved to Cheshire.

I represented the LTA at Iain's funeral and met his daughter, Sue Webb, who is Director of Tennis at the Lookout Mountain Club in Georgia. She now plays seniors tennis for Team Southern and the state of Tennessee's O60 Women's team and has very fond memories of playing county tennis for Nottinghamshire.

Iain made a significant contribution to Nottinghamshire tennis. I first met him when he presented the prizes at a Notts LTA junior tournament thirty years ago. The last time I spoke to him was appropriately on Wimbledon's Centre Court.

The Play Your Way to Wimbledon County Finals were held at the County Ground in July. This year's winners were Lisa Bolton and Oliver Melady and the runners-up were Lucy Perry and Joshua Yard. This event was refereed by our current LTA Councillor, Andy Bradley.

Andy deservedly won Official of the Year at the 2023 Notts LTA Tennis Awards. In August, as usual, he was responsible for the annual Notts County Championships, which are supported by Pendragon's Car Store.

Our youngest winner was Zac Kurien in the 8U Singles and our most experienced winner was Freya Christie, who won the Women's Doubles with Helen Cridland. The Women's Singles winner was Sophie Lager, who also picked up the 18U Girls Doubles title with Rebeka Hodi. The Men's Singles winner was Andrew Higham, who also won the Men's Doubles with Thomas Pritchard.

Thomas Pritchard won two other doubles titles – the 14U Boys and the 16U Boys, both with Oliver Melady – and also the 14U Boys Singles. Evie Pritchard, Most Improved Girl Player in our Tennis Awards, won both the 10U and the 11U Girls singles and the 10U Mixed Doubles with Joseph Welton. Joseph also won the 9U Boys singles and the 9U Mixed Doubles with Stefan Marinescu.

Lucy Perry won four titles – the 12U Girls Singles, the 14U Girls singles, the 12U Girls Doubles and the 14U Girls Doubles, both with Clementine Rennoldson. Alistair Jennings won the 12U Boys Singles and the 12U Boys Doubles with Archie Killen Smith. Jasper Riley won the 18U Boys Singles and the 18U Boys Doubles with Benjamin Phillips.

The other county champions were Imogen Drummond (9U Girls Singles), Max Goodridge (10U Boys Singles), Henry Anderson (11U Boys Singles), Jack Stamp (16U Boys Singles), Lisa Bolton (16U Girls Singles) and Isabella Smillie (18U Girls Singles).

Well done to all of them and special thanks to Andy Bradley, Maxine Barklett, Jill Shelvey and all the team for delivering a memorable and enjoyable tournament. The event was hosted by West Bridgford Tennis Club with some of the junior matches at The Park LTC.

Everyone agreed that the change of venue was a great success. The atmosphere on the viewing balcony, overlooking the outside courts, was excellent.

Rosie Watkins' 14 years' service in the county office was honoured at our Tennis Awards in March and she is now enjoying an extremely well-earned retirement. Maxine Barklett has joined us as our County Administrator and we are very pleased to have her on board. She certainly had a baptism of fire getting to grips with the LTA's user-unfriendly tournament software.

Ade Bates has been working very successfully with us since the beginning of the year as our Social Media Coordinator. Our social media coverage is now very impressive so do keep sharing your successes and news with him. We should like to see more club news on our excellent new website – news like Nottingham Castle Tennis Club's NSPCC Charity Doubles Tournament, organised by Izzy Bramhall and Sue Martin, or East Bridgford Tennis Club's centenary celebration, which I attended on a perfect summer's afternoon.

Finally, on behalf of all the clubs and places to play, I should like to thank Sue Clague and all the members of the Board for all the time and effort they put in with a big thank you to all the other volunteers in Nottinghamshire.

In the end our valiant GB Davis Cup team could not get past Serbia and Novak Djokovic. However, 22-year-old Jannik Sinner defeated him in both singles and doubles in the Davis Cup and also in the group stage of the ATP finals. Coupled with 20-year-old Carlos Alcaraz's victory in the Wimbledon final, perhaps this was the year that the future of men's tennis finally arrived.

The future's bright, though it may no longer be orange.

Good luck for 2024.

Christopher Walker

December 2023