

GX (DUKES WOOD) LTC

Tennis Section Annual General Meeting

19:45 for 20:00 Friday 6th November 2009 at the Clubhouse.

Committee

Bob Mason – Chairman		Steve Prokopiou – Treasurer
Paul Richmond – Secretary		Gillian Vargassoff – Membership
Beverley Halliday & Helen Marlow – Social		
Rachel Knight	Richard Cox	Tim Barber
Angela Brady	Tom Dean – Coach	Mina Diamond

Members present

Viv Wong	Stella Ellis	Mike Twinning
Barbie Watson	Ken Rumens	Sally Buckley
Ann James	Steve Breeze	Barry James
Richard Fensome	Andrew Rumens	Suzanne Rumens
Nick Woolf		

1 - APOLOGIES

Penny Sankey	Anne Marie Eastwood	Jane Moss
Ba Coulson	Sue Reid	Philip Sellers

2 - MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF 2008 AGM

The minutes were approved. Proposed by AB seconded by GV

3 - CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Introduction

The Club was not in the best of shape going into the 2008/9 year.

Membership had been declining consistently since its peak in 2002 (approx 450) and had ended 2008 at 255 – a worryingly low and unsustainable level. There was little or no money in the bank to repair, let alone resurface, courts and despite the Tennis section's financial contributions to the Sports Club over the years, there was no sinking fund in the Sports Club accounts that could help either.

Feedback from the Membership Survey conducted in late 2007 had highlighted, amongst other things, dissatisfaction with the arrangements for junior coaching, the lack of floodlighting and the general state of the courts. Little or no progress was being made on any of these issues.

Immediately after the AGM, I was delighted to be able to engage the committed and energetic support of a new Committee. Members should be in no doubt that without the significant efforts of the new Committee the progress which I am able to report today simply would not have happened. I am very grateful for their support and for all they have done over the past year to get Dukes Wood back to where it should be.

The Committee for the past year has comprised:

Tim Barber,
Angie Brady,
Richard Cox,

Mina Diamond,
Beverley Halliday and Helen Marlow (Social Secretaries)
Richard King,
Rachel Knight,
Steve Prokopiou, (Treasurer)
Paul Richmond, (Secretary)
Gillian Vargassoff, (Membership Secretary)
Allan Watson,
Bob Mason, (Chair)

In addition Sally Buckley has taken on the role of Fixtures Secretary but does not attend Committee Meetings. I should like to thank Judy Clare for stepping in to the Fixture Secretary role during the summer and for providing very helpful continuity.

Objectives for 2008/9

When the new Committee started in Autumn 2008, we resolved to address five key objectives for the coming year. These were as follows:

- Arrest the decline in membership numbers and if possible grow the membership to a more sustainable level;
- Create a capital fund which could be used to pay for urgent development works on the courts;
- Revitalise the coaching structure within the club;
- Prepare a plan for the redevelopment of the playing facilities including the court playing surface and floodlights;
- Redefine the Tennis Section's relationship with the Sports Club to one which was fairer to Tennis and did not result in Tennis effectively subsidising the other sections and the Club itself.
-

The Committee has met monthly since to address these priorities.

Progress Report

Membership

I am delighted to report that membership ended the year at:

Senior members	191	(+31%)
Junior Members	166	(+52%)
TOTAL	357	(+40%)

Membership Subscriptions had risen sharply in recent years and, as a result, members and prospective members did not judge the overall package of membership benefits to represent good value for money. The higher fees were a major contributory factor in members not renewing their membership and in the difficulty of attracting new members to join the Club.

The Committee took the view that for the 2008/9 season, Membership Subscriptions should be reduced across all classes of membership to represent better value for money and to be more attractive to new members looking to join. The risks to our revenues were also very much in our mind, of course, particularly if we failed to attract more members.

In a determined effort to attract new members, we ran an Open Day at the end of April which was very well attended. Over 2000 flyers announcing the day had been distributed door to door across the whole of Gerrards Cross. Free coaching was laid-on for juniors and seniors, a barbeque ran all day and there were a number of other attractions. To our pleasant surprise, many new members signed-up on the day and others returned their forms in the following few days. We were struck by how many local people (including Dukes Wood estate residents) who came along for the first time did not even know that our Tennis club existed!

Central to our success in growing members, however, has been our new Head Coach Tom Dean who has been a major factor in the Club being able to attract juniors from other clubs to join Dukes Wood and to

encourage other juniors who had left because of their dissatisfaction with previous coaching arrangements, to return. To take our junior membership from around 100 to approaching 170 in the year has been a great achievement and I should like to place on record the Committee's thanks to Tom Dean for all he has done to make this possible.

Financials

In what has been a tough year for the economy generally, significant efforts have been made to maximise our income and to reduce our expenditure as far as possible. Our Treasurer, Steve Prokopiou, will provide the detail in his report but thanks to the tight financial disciplines which he has put in place, the good news is that, despite reducing individual membership subscriptions, we have grown our membership income by 15% in the year and our overall income by 15% in the same period.

A key element of our income this year has come from the various social events run through the season. Through the tireless efforts of Beverley Halliday and Helen Marlow our joint Social Secretaries, in running some tremendous events they have grown our social activities income by 15%.

On the expenditure side, through careful house-keeping and having paid £16,000 to the Sports Club (£1000 more than we had in fact committed to pay) we have been able to generate a healthy cash surplus which has been used to pay for the essential resurfacing of Courts 5 and 6 both of which were in urgent need of repair. Had we not been able to do this, we would have had little alternative but to have taken the courts out of use.

Tennis Programme

Competitive tennis has thrived in the season. Our club teams had a successful year with the Ladies 1st team winning their division and the Mens 1st team narrowly missing out on promotion to the Premier division.

Although the Club Tournament got-off to a slow start early in the season, Finals Day was an altogether different affair with some highly competitive matches and some great tennis being played in both the senior and junior events. A good attendance of spectators, family and friends were treated to some fine matches with the following players emerging victorious in the various events. The quality of the tennis, especially amongst our juniors, bodes well for the future. Congratulations go to:

Juniors

Girls U12: Winner - Laura Hole, R/U Rosa Halliday

Boys U12: Winner - Alex Hattam, R/U Spencer King

Girls U14: Winner - Emily Halliday, R/U Darcy King

Boys U14: Winner - Alex Hattam, R/U Spencer King

Girls U16: Winner - Emily Graham, R/U Emily Halliday

Boys U16: Winner - Jake Glover, R/U Cameron Buckman

Girls U18: Winner - Amy Glover, R/U Ellen Richmond

Boys U18: Winner - Rory Brown, R/U Hallam Wood

Girls Doubles: Winners - Emma Wanblad/Darcy King, R/U Rosa Halliday/Lydia Richmond

Boys Doubles: Winners - James Kirby/Jake Glover, R/U Spencer King/Harrison Simmonds

Mixed Doubles: Winners - Rory Walsh/Amy Glover, R/U Spencer King/Rosa Halliday

Seniors

Ladies Singles: Winner - Georgia Morrison, R/U Suzanne McGuinness

Mens Singles: Winner - Julian Peers, R/U Andy Peers

Ladies Doubles: Winners - Suzanne McGuinness/Angie Brady, R/U Lucy Holmes/Lucy Godfrey

Mens Doubles: Winners - Andy Peers/Julian Peers, R/U Richard King/Keith Gibson

Mixed Doubles: Winners - Julian Peers/Angela Hart, R/U Bob Mason/Sally Buckley

Mixed Plate Doubles: Winners - Richard Fensome/Gill Outram, R/U Graham Louer/Helen Marlow

In a moving address, Rory Walsh presented this year's special Lyndsey Kelly Award, for the junior who had contributed most to the junior life of the Club, to **Spencer King**. Thoroughly deserved recognition for a super young member who had previously been runner-up in no less than four finals. That's character for you.

Earlier in the season, we decided to move Junior Club Night to the first part of Friday evening with seniors having access to the courts from 6.30pm. Senior Club Night was moved to Wednesday to accommodate this. Whilst this change proved very successful and popular with junior members and their parents, the court-sharing arrangement and Wednesday Club Night was not popular with some of our senior members. In response to that feedback, Senior Club Night reverted to Friday evenings in July.

Amongst the successes of the season, however, it must be acknowledged that Saturday Social Tennis has been disappointing for many members. Attendance has been variable and members have expressed frustration at the lack of organised play and the use of two of the courts for coaching. The Committee are very conscious of these concerns and are keen to make a number of improvements for next summer season, so that Saturday afternoons are an active, enjoyable and well attended session for our senior members. I am very keen to hear from members what more they would like to see done to improve the playing experience on both senior club nights and Saturday afternoons.

[Reminder: Saturday club afternoon continues through the winter starting at 1.00pm for those hardy souls wishing to keep their social tennis going through the winter months.]

Coaching

Andrew Nealon, our Head Coach for the last eight years announced that he would be stepping down from his role at the last AGM. This followed a number of concerns being expressed about the junior coaching programme at the Club. Following further discussions with Andrew after the AGM, we reached a mutually acceptable and amicable agreement for Andrew to move on. Subsequently, we also decided to stop using Lauren Lerner's coaching services and start the search for a new Head Coach in an effort to make a completely fresh start. Lauren kindly continued through the winter months until we were able to appoint our new Head Coach and we are grateful for the continuity she provided.

The Head Coach vacancy was advertised on both the Bucks LTA and main LTA web-sites and attracted interest, literally, from around the world! We short-listed five UK-based coaches and interviewed four of them. One withdrew before the interview. From this strong short-list we decided to appoint Tom Dean who at the time was an Assistant Coach at Bull Lane. Tom started in March 2009 and made an immediate and sustained impact.

Tom (and his Assistant Coaches Shahi and Rory) has been instrumental in re-invigorating coaching at the Club. He has worked with members at every level including, even, introducing a 'mini-tots' group to the junior programme. His positive and enthusiastic attitude has shone through in everything he has done. Our juniors have responded superbly to this new injection of energy and quality. Similarly, our senior members have a huge respect for Tom. He has not only played brilliantly for the Mens 1st team but he has also worked with and drilled the teams to raise the level of competitive team play. Also, as has been mentioned, the fact that so many new junior members have joined the Club is due almost wholly to Tom's 'pulling-power'.

The Committee would like to thank Tom for all his efforts and to congratulate him on a tremendous first year and for making such a strong start to his first Head Coach position. He has significantly raised the 'coaching bar' at Dukes Wood and we look forward to him continuing to build on that success in the coming season and in the years ahead.

Relations with the Sports Club

Through a number of frank discussions with Philip Kimberley, the Sports Club Chairman, I am pleased to report that we have succeeded in moving the Sports Club, and indeed all the sections, to consider an alternative operating model for the Sports Club which will be much fairer to Tennis. Historically Tennis, as the largest section by membership, has contributed a disproportionate amount towards club finances. This has had the effect of 'subsidising' the other sections, principally cricket. Despite the significant contributions from Tennis over the years, the Sports Club have used the funds provided on a variety of things other than Tennis. Consequently, when we asked the Sports Club for financial help to resurface courts and to improve playing facilities, the cupboard was bare and the Sports Club were unable to help.

This unacceptable state of affairs had to change and so, with the help of Tim Barber who has done tremendous work modelling some alternative ways of operating, we have now reached a basis of agreement which the Committee feel is much fairer for Tennis and indeed the Sports Club as a whole. Thank you Tim for all you have done to help resolve this very difficult and contentious issue.

The new model will be proposed by Philip Kimberley at the Sports Club AGM on 16th November. Essentially, it is built on the principle of each of the sections covering their own 'field of play' running and capital costs whilst sharing the common costs of running the Clubhouse and common areas on an agreed membership headcount basis. This will mean that Tennis's contribution to the Sports Club will continue at roughly the same level as last year but crucially will allow us to build a 'sinking-fund' which we can use to develop our courts and playing facilities in the years ahead.

Social Events

I have already mentioned the increase in the income generated from social events in the year and the significant efforts made by Beverley Halliday and Helen Marlow in creating an interesting and well attended social calendar. Highlights have included: the Burns Night Supper, the Open Day, a Curry Night, a Race Night, a Quiz Night and the Summer Ball at Harewood Downs Golf Club. We hope to be able to provide a similarly attractive programme next year. Helen has indicated that she would like to step-down from the joint Social Secretary role although will continue to help with various events. However, I am delighted to say that Beverley has confirmed that she is willing to be considered for re-election for a further year.

The role of Social Secretary is demanding and I would like to say a special thank you to both Beverley and Helen for such a great effort during the past year.

Future Priorities

Looking forward, the objectives identified earlier all remain as key areas of focus for the Committee. Having attracted new members over the past season, we must give them, and indeed all our members, lots of reasons to want to remain members of Dukes Wood. Tom has lots of ideas to build further on the coaching programme.

However, we are determined to make further progress in the coming year on several other areas, specifically:

- We remain determined to secure accreditation as an LTA '**ClubMark**' Club. Once obtained, this will greatly assist us in applying for LTA grants and loans to help with club development activity;
- It is important that we find better ways of organising senior social tennis on both Senior Club Night and Saturday afternoons. The Committee is minded to appoint a '**Senior Captain**' whose primary role would be the organisation and communication of senior social play throughout the season. I would be interested to hear members' views on this proposal or indeed any other ideas which people may have. If anyone would like to take-on the envisaged Captain's role, could they please let me know;
- We plan to introduce the role of '**Communications Co-ordinator**' to the Committee so that our communications with members about what is going on at the Club whether playing, social events or developments are managed in a co-ordinated way. We are also keen to develop and make more use of the Tennis Club website and introduce an open channel for members to express their views on Club activities and put forward their ideas. The Communications Co-ordinator will lead this work. Again, if anyone would be interested in taking on this role, please let me know.
- We are keen to resurface Courts 1 and 2 within the next 18 months and in doing so introduce a new **artificial grass surface** to the two courts. The poor drainage on Courts 1 and 2 is already beginning to signal problems and after a further winter season the condition of the Courts may make this work even more urgent;

- In parallel to resurfacing Courts 1 and 2, we also plan to seek planning permission for the installation of **floodlighting** on both courts. The Club has tried three times to obtain this in the past and has had its application rejected on each occasion. The Committee firmly believe that the absence of floodlights places us at a serious disadvantage against all other local clubs who now have lights. Without breaking through local objections and installing lights, the long-term viability of the Tennis club will be undermined. We have already written to neighbours signalling our intention to seek planning permission and we are arranging meetings with local residents to allay their concerns. I am grateful to Angie Brady for all she has done to open this dialogue in such a positive and friendly manner. I am also delighted to say that Tony Brazier has offered to take on the project from here and with his knowledge and experience of planning rules and procedures steer the preparation and submission of our planning application. I shall keep members regularly advised of progress through the normal Newsletters as the work progresses.

4 - TREASURERS REPORT

Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by NW and seconded by BJ

In summary	Income up by	15%
	Membership	40%+

SP thanked the team captains for their thoroughness in collecting and passing on match fees. He also thanked BJ for his continuing organisation of indoor tennis.

Social events raised £5k+ for the club this year and SP thanked the membership for their continuing support of these events.

The costs of management were down by 15% despite the appointment of a new coach and procurement of equipment.

The Financial Year ended with the section in far better shape than it started.

£9k in the newly established sinking fund - having made provision for the cost of refurbishment of courts 5&6.

This year the section anticipates making a similar contribution to the Sports Club during 2009/10 as during 2008/9 (£16k). There will be a new funding and finance model which will be proposed at the Sports Club AGM.

See also separate file (GXDWLTC_financeAGM09.pdf)

5 - COACH'S REPORT

Tom began his report by thanking the club for appointing him and its support to him during the season. Knowing of the formidable competition for the post he was flattered to be asked to join Dukes Wood.

Upon appointment Tom reflected that he had set himself various objectives for the year, the first of which was to increase section membership by 10%. Lots of people got behind this initiative and, in retrospect; the target seems low with an increase now known to be in excess of 40%. He recognised that there were very many members who had contributed to making this happen.

He acknowledged his assistants, Shahi and Rory, for the contributions they made. Shahi's work, in particular, resulted in several families joining the club.

TD is now looking to appoint a female assistant to change the coaching team's dynamic and give scope to expand their remit into schools.

TD stated that he saw the club as vibrant for 6 months of the year and believed that installing floodlighting was essential to extending this around the calendar. He has arrangements in place to use floodlit courts elsewhere, particularly at the Memorial Centre.

He reported that 'rusty rackets' sessions had been successful and he has a new initiative, Cardio Tennis. Tennis coffee mornings have proved to be successful. He has invested in a coffee maker and members will often bring cakes so they can sit after play and enjoy a drink and bite to eat.

On Friday evenings TD stated that he should have looked more carefully at the detail of the arrangements and he recognised the need to ensure that junior sessions were complete by the time seniors arrived for their social session.

He reflected that it was great that during the summer parents would stay at the clubhouse and enjoy a glass of wine while their children were playing and staying for tea. He believes it is important for the future health of the club for juniors and seniors to mix and play on the same night and he is committed to making it work.

Regarding Clubmark – TD believes it is essential to gain accreditation by next season. Without it the club is almost invisible. It would also lead to the ability to apply for grants for facilities.

6 - ELECTION OF OFFICERS for 2009 / 10

Chairman – Bob Mason	proposed by PR seconded by BJ
Treasurer Steve Prokopiou	proposed by TD seconded by VW
Secretary – Paul Richmond	proposed by AB seconded by RK
Membership Sec – Gillian Vargassoff	proposed by BJ seconded by BW
Social Sec – Beverley Halliday	proposed by AJ seconded by GV

7 - AOB

BM asked the membership if they believed the current direction on playing facilities development was correct.

There followed a discussion on the ambition to install artificial grass and floodlights – what the advantages of the new surface might be if we were able to afford it over and above the necessity of replacing the tarmac which would be the foundation for any changes.

- Attributes discussed included
- Simple maintenance
- Easy on the legs and (older) joints
- Lots of different types to chose from
- We would look for a surface which was kind on the legs while having good aesthetics. Not too fast or too slow. Without the need for much sand as ‘dressing’.
- It is a very popular surface in other clubs
- More durable
- Can be safer
- With good base layer would be drier.

BJ pointed out that the surface of courts 1&2 were now 14 years old so it was unsurprising they required attention now. He reflected that the year had been one which started with doom and gloom and congratulated the committee on turning this around to being in such an optimistic position at the AGM.

BJ reflected that despite the increase in membership he had seen only one new family playing on either Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning. BM said we all have to reach out to new members, really push the positive aspects of the club and ensure everyone feels welcome.

SB asked how we can stimulate attendance and play. Can team members come to social tennis sessions? It was agreed that they would and BM replied that the idea of a Senior Club Captain was key to sustaining this. The role would be a uniting figure who encourages attendance and organises play particularly on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon.

AW suggested that Supper Night on following play on Friday evenings was reinstated as a regular event. It would be another way for members of all standards and backgrounds to mix and support one another.

SP echoed this sentiment and said that meals should be social and informal – no need to change from court attire!

The meeting thanked Warren for updating the honour boards.

GV agreed to maintain communication by post where members were unable to use email & the internet although the clubs policy continues to be to use electronic communications for the propagation of written information.

BM brought the meeting to a close at 21:20 thanking all for their contribution to what must be seen as a healthy year for the tennis section.