

Radley College Tennis Court

Spring 2020

'Half a Yard' - The Club Newsletter

PLAYING OUR PART!

The second Newsletter of 2020

A week may be a long time in politics but it is a very, very long time without real tennis...

There are many more pressing concerns for everyone currently, but we hope that this newsletter will provide a welcome diversion at a time that is so difficult for so many.

It was inevitable, but the ordered closure of the Radley real tennis court has been a shock to the system.

Thank you to all those members who have written with messages of support and offers of help for the Pro team. These are much appreciated.

We are extremely fortunate to be part of Radley College, which is responding to the Coronavirus crisis with its customary confidence, community-mindedness and generosity.

The Pros have joined the network of College staff and their families that is providing support in all sorts of ways to the wider Radley village community; from picking up prescriptions and doing shopping for vulnerable residents to dog-walking and morale-boosting phone calls to those unable to leave their homes.

The purpose of this newsletter is to let you know about more about what is happening at RCTC during the shutdown, to keep you up to date with some of the goings on in the wider world of tennis and to provide a bit of tennis-related entertainment.

There is also news of recent competition success for members of the club, which provide a welcome reason for congratulations and photos.

We will let our members know as soon as tennis can be played again. In the meantime, the only play on court is imaginary...



For an explanation of why Edward Bear is pictured with Edward R's racquet, ready to volley out of the grille a pile of unusual balls in Radley College's colours, turn to page 7, for the report of The Celtic Challenge.

Starting us off with some tennis-related entertainment, CJR has written a piece about taking Roger Federer on court at Hampton Court in 2005.

Roger Federer

In the early part of his career, one of Roger Federer's sponsors was Maurice Lacroix, makers of luxury Swiss watches. As part of his deal, Roger had to give them five 'promotional days' per year. A list of options was presented to him and in June 2005, just before his third win at Wimbledon, he selected 'real tennis at Hampton Court'.

I was detailed to meet him and his partner (now wife) Mirka at The All England Club in a taxi and spend the journey explaining the rules to him. We quickly established that he would not need much detail and that I was there to make him look good rather than foolish.

I asked him if he was as superstitious as other tennis players, not changing socks throughout a tournament, or always staying in the same 'lucky' residence. He replied that he wasn't and, in any case, would not want to stay where he had been the previous year. As he was handed the keys to the house, apparently, the owner had asked him if he wouldn't mind watering the plants, to which he had agreed, even though he was paying an extortionate amount of rent.

The next morning, he discovered to his chagrin that there were plants absolutely everywhere. "I got tennis elbow heaving buckets of water round the house!" It is a measure of the man that he agreed to the chore, performed it and was laughing about it a year later.

Roger then yawned and apologised, saying that he had had ten hours of sleep the previous night. I commented that it was hardly surprising, considering that he had spent six and a half hours on court in the finals of the Halle tournament, two days earlier. "By the way," I asked, "Why were you, clearly a singles specialist, playing doubles in that event?" "Aw," he responded, "I have this Swiss mate who is not quite good enough to get on the circuit by himself, but if I play a few doubles events with him..."

Once at Hampton Court, Roger was the charming and urbane athlete that we have come to know and respect. He played a short exhibition with me and had a few rallies with each of the invited journalists,



including Sally Jones and Matthew Syed, finishing with a press conference. As it was the week before Wimbledon, there were very many questions about his title defence, during which he demonstrated optimism and courtesy and a remarkable command of European languages.

He was intrigued by our game. After the sponsors and the press had disappeared, he said to Mirka, "Hey, come and have a go at this. It's fun!" She agreed and they knocked a few balls around, but she wouldn't let him play for long, as she was worried that he would injure himself just before the biggest tournament of the year.

Maybe one day, if he ever retires from flannelball, we can entice him into playing.

Lovely man!

CJR

Radley College Tennis Court

There has been a lot of change affecting real tennis in the past few weeks and no doubt there is more to come.

What follows is a round-up of news relating to Team Radley and the clubs of Radley, Oratory and Bordeaux. The plans in place for each of these courts and clubs have had to change dramatically.

Professional and Management Team

CJR and Nino remain at home locally and, although Levi has returned to his family home in Dorset, he is keen to come back as soon as possible. Levi says that he has learned more about real tennis in the past ten weeks than in the previous ten years.

Levi thanks everyone at Radley and the Oratory who has made him so welcome and enabled him to get his career as a Professional off to such an enjoyable, fulfilling and very busy start.

Zack Smart spent a couple of weeks at Radley recently and was expected to return next month, in order to provide extra cover during the summer visits by CJR to Bordeaux. Sadly, this will not now happen, as plans for the Bordeaux court have changed yet again (see below).

At Radley, we responded to each stage of the Government's response with increased hygiene and logistical changes. For example, we discovered that the cupboard under the stairs has an average temperature of over 30C and so has been an excellent place to put the balls overnight, given the rumour that this sort of temperature would be hot enough to kill the virus, should any be on them.

We totally understand why the court has had to close, but it is regrettable for many reasons, as the environment is one in which social distancing can be maintained and exercise can be taken regardless of weather. How fortunate it has been that we have had so much sunshine this week, which has been perfectly timed for taking outdoor exercise.

May the fine weather last long!

Without its customary 15 hours of play a day, the Radley court has a rather forlorn air, but it is not completely empty. You won't be surprised to know that CJR is self-isolating there and so bits of necessary repair, cleaning and admin will be carried out over the weeks ahead.

We are still deciding whether to evict the enormous spider that lives halfway up the wall at the Service End, but it seems churlish in the circumstances. It remains a mystery what it finds to eat, unless it likes ball fluff...

Oratory Real Tennis Club

As you may know, the Oratory School reacted quickly and closed its Sports Centre on 14 March to non-school users, which forced the closure of the real tennis court. The momentum that Team Radley has been able to build has stalled for the meantime but the re-kindled enthusiasm for the court and club will be freshly ignited when play can resume.

Since Team Radley took over responsibility for the court on 6 January, the average hours of club use had increased from about 15 per week over the previous couple of years to around 50 hours each week by the time the court closed.

New players have been attracted to the game, thanks, in the main, to the efforts of existing members, have been enthused by their time on court with Nino and Levi and were in the process of becoming members of the club. The closure of the court is particularly untimely, as the relaunch of the club was going so well.

We were very grateful to Tim Tomalin and the committee of the Friends of Hardwick for immediately agreeing to allow Oratory players to use the Hardwick court and for Levi to give lessons there to Oratory and Hardwick members. Unfortunately, this usage had barely started before Hardwick, like all other courts, shut down.

From the outset, the plan has been that Team Radley would be responsible for the court at the Oratory until the appointment of a new permanent Professional, in time for the new season in the Autumn of 2020.

Team Radley will be replaced by Team Fahey.

The Fahey family will be moving to the Oratory over the Summer and Rob Fahey will take over the running of the real tennis court and club from the start of the new season in September 2020. It has been announced that Claire Fahey will be Head of Racquet Sports and Games Coach at the Oratory, which is a result of the school's decision to admit girls from September 2020.

When he starts at ORTC, Rob will still be Men's World Champion, as the Challenge against Camden Riviere, due to take place in a month's time at Prested, has been postponed until October 20, 22 and 24.

Bordeaux

The use of the court in Bordeaux has been further delayed, along with the official opening due on 4 May and the two tournaments planned for the days on either side of this event.

CJR and MH-T were planning to spend a good deal of their time in Bordeaux from 23 April until the end of August. The plan was that they would run the opening events and other fixtures, welcome visiting players, launch the club by recruiting new members and help the small band of existing members to revive their skills.

It is now unlikely that they will spend any time in Bordeaux, as the club there needs to appoint a permanent Professional from September 2020.

Court Ratings

The temperature gradient of the courts, ranging from the balmy at Radley, to the cold of Oratory and the frigid of Hardwick, is as different as the courts are from each other, in terms of play. This is just another way in which the game provides endless challenge to players, on top of such unique elements as the 'ski-jump' penthouse at Holyport and the massive tambour at the Oratory.

Perhaps all courts should have a 'Mid-Winter Layer-Rating', which might range from the rating of 'One' at Radley and Queen's, to the 'Three +' (the '+' being hat AND gloves) at Hardwick and Oxford?

Club Members - Home and Away

Away -

Some of you may have played, or at least tried, Rackets, which many feel is the perfect game to play before switching to real tennis, because of its speed and the use of the walls and angles. Radley College has the only court in and around Oxford.

One of our junior real tennis playing members, India Deakin, had been growing in experience and stature as a player of Rackets and combining this with a year as an intern at Queen's Club. She recently recorded her finest win to date.



India Deakin and Tara Lumley, 2020 World Champions of Ladies Rackets with their prizes and the brand new and stylish Ladies' World Doubles Championship trophy

On 7 March, India and her partner, Tara Lumley, won the inaugural Ladies World Doubles Championship, held at Wellington College. They defeated Lea van der Zwalmen and partner, Louisa Gengler-Saint, in a hard-fought Final, winning 18/17, 15/11, 6/15, 18/13. Congratulations to India and Tara and commiserations to Lea and Louisa.

The match showcased the rapidly improving standard of women's Rackets, with crisp rallies, great returning and top-class shot-making. Even Lea's skills, as reigning Singles World Champion, were not enough to deny the more balanced pairing of Deakin and Lumley.

Away –

Congratulations to Chris Manson, who won the National Category E tournament, for players with handicaps in the range of 40-44, at Wellington.



Chris Manson, with his still-boxed trophy, next to Alex Brodie, whom he defeated 6-2, 6-0, on the Wellington College court

The match report on the T&RA website refers to his 'attacking and consistent game' and to him getting 'better and better' during the Final against Alex Brodie, of Hatfield. Their match was played late in the evening, as almost all the preceding matches had gone to three sets and/or had lasted at least an hour and a half. This, the report went on to say, is testament to the accuracy of the handicapping system.

N.B. You may or may not know that both the handicapping system as well as the national category tournaments for amateurs were created by CJR in the 1980s.

Away –

The British Amateur U20 Championship (The Prested Cup) was held at Prested Hall just over a month ago and comprised three elements; a handicap Satellite round-robin, with a Satellite knock-out tournament to produce a winner who would progress to the Championship itself.

The Satellite tournament was won by Magnus Garson, in a re-match of the 2019 final, again beating James Rossiter.

Magnus's win propelled him into the Final of the Championship, in which he played Benedict Yorston. This match therefore featured a current Radley boy, Magnus (with a handicap of 36.1), against an Old Radleian (playing off 18.7), Benedict, and the match was played level.

Fifteen-year old Magnus battled his way to five games all in the first set, and had a set point, but Ben took the set 6-5. Although Magnus went down 3-6 in the second set, he played magnificently well against a player with a much lower handicap. Benedict will be too old to play next year, and so will it be Magnus's turn to take the title in 2021?

The following week, Benedict (now an undergraduate at Oxford and living in a room at Merton that is fewer strides than his age from the court), played in his first Varsity Match.



Benedict Yorston, in action at Lord's, in the 2020 Varsity Match

More success for Oxford.

The Dark Blues had a clean-sweep in the 2020 Varsity Matches; winning the men's and women's Blues match at Lord's, sponsored by Pol Roger, as well as the Second Team event.

Benedict was one of two Radley members who represented Oxford this year, as Lottie Hoskin played for the Women's Blues side.



Lottie Hoskin, now an Oxford Blue, enjoying a celebratory glass of Pol Roger in the Long Room at Lord's after the Varsity Match

Inter-Club Matches

The Franklin Solicitors Thames Valley League –

The League has reached its final stages. Radley is currently second in the table, but other teams have games in hand. We have only one match left to play, which was to be played on Sunday 5 April at home, against Holyport.

Oratory is currently heading the League by one point but has only one more match to play. Last year's winners, Oxford, appear to be out of it, but should never be written off.

The tournament organiser is currently working out what to do about the final result, given that the season cannot be completed as planned and re-arranging matches may be extremely difficult.

A decision should be forthcoming soon. If you thought sorting out the Premier League was difficult, spare a thought...

The Brodie Cup –

The Brodie Cup (another competition generously supported by Champagne Pol Roger) is Radley's

main event in the national inter-club tournament calendar and is a team competition for players in the H30-50 range.

Radley made it to our fourth Final in six years, which was played at The Hyde, Bridport, on Sunday March 8. We faced Seacourt, who were Runners-up to Oxford in last year's competition. Seacourt and Radley typically have a strong mix of Seniors and fast-improving Juniors in their sides and this year was no exception.

It was a superb match, with five rubbers of high-quality tennis. The first went to Seacourt, and we levelled with a win in the second. Then Radley pulled ahead, and it was Seacourt's turn to level. It all came down to the final rubber, the H45 Doubles.



The Radley players in the front row, after receiving their Runners-up prizes on the court at The Hyde; (L-R) Martin McNair, Giles Fitzpatrick, Tony Munsey, Hugo Axel-Berg, Ed Alder, Ed Crowston and Max Wetton

Ed Alder and new partner Hugo Axel-Berg (in the absence of Henry Henman due to shoulder surgery, from which we hope he will have a swift and full recovery) took on the Seacourt pair that contained Matt Boulton, a fine lawn tennis player who has recently converted to 'realers'. Not many people are able to out-volley Ed, but Matt did so, and his speed of reaction stunned the spectators.

Seacourt won the first set and Radley did tremendously well to come back to win the second set 6-5, setting up a third set to decide the outcome

of the fixture. The tension was terrific, as the support from a packed Dedans (partisan, but sporting) got more and more intense.

From three games all, Seacourt edged ahead and took the set 6-3, thus winning the match. Congratulations to the Seacourt team on a fine win.

Funny thing. When Radley won the Brodie Cup, it was in our third Final. Oxford achieved the same last year, beating Seacourt, and now Seacourt have succeeded in their third Final in a row.

Huge thanks go to all those club and college players (who are marked 'RC' in the list that follows) who represented Radley during this campaign for their enthusiasm, commitment and tremendous efforts on court. No Captain could have asked for more and it was fantastic to reach yet another Final.

The Radley Roll of Honour: Matthew Alden, Ed Alder (RC), Hugo Axel-Berg, Edward Crowston (RC), Giles Fitzpatrick, Magnus Garson (RC), Henry Henman, Martin McNair (who won his matches in every round), Tony Munsey and Max Wetton (RC).

The Pol Roger Trophy -

The Pol Roger Trophy is structured like the Brodie Cup, but is the elite amateur team event, being for players in the lowest handicap ranges, typically of below H20, but this year the highest handicapped player was playing off 15.

The Royal Tennis Court faced Queen's Club in an all-London Final that took place at The Oratory on Saturday 7 March, with Levi and Nino marking expertly. The quality of the tennis was superb, and, like the Brodie Cup, the match came down to the third set of the final rubber, with RTC emerging as the worthy winners.

Tournament at Radley

The Celtic Challenge –

In 2018, the first Celtic Challenge took place at Radley. A team of England and Ireland-based Irish passport holders picked up the gauntlet that had been thrown down by the Scots and played singles and doubles in a match with some novel rules.

The Irish recorded a fine win and followed up with an even more emphatic victory in 2019.

The Scots were smarting from successive defeats and determined to do better this year.



The victorious Scottish team, minus Miles Buckinghamshire:
(L-R) James Maclachlan, Grant Miller, MH-T, holding the Tunnock's Trophy, David Anderson, Alan Moug and Calum Maclean

The Irish side has been generously sponsored each year by the makers of the World's Finest Liqueur and Double Gold Medal Winners at the World Spirits Competition in 2009, Coole Swan, based in County Meath.

The Scottish team receives the support of the iconic Scottish confectionary brand, Tunnock's, whose products fuel the efforts of all the players who battle it out for the Tunnock's Trophy.



The Tunnock's Trophy for 2020 rests on a Saltire

The Celtic Challenge is most fortunate to have the support of two such fine and successful family-run businesses.

Although fiercely-contested, the event is more a celebration of Celtic camaraderie than division and is played in a festival spirit. Points are awarded to each player for a win, a loss, for games won and for hitting winning openings (grille, dedans and winning gallery). This means that each player, in every set, contributes points to their team's total. It is possible to score more points than the player who beats you and who suffers a Pyrrhic victory. Individual prizes are awarded for on and off court aspects of the day's play.

The result stood thus:

- Scotland: 711.5 points; Ireland: 645 points;
- The Tunnock's Award for the highest Scottish score - David Anderson, with 139 points, who also scored 25 points for hitting winning openings;
- The Coole Swan Award for the highest Irish score - Roland Budd, with 130 points, who scored an impressive 29 points from the winning openings;
- James MacLachlan was awarded the prize for the greatest number of points, 65, for a first-time player in the Scottish side;
- Maggie Gibbs was awarded the prize for the greatest number of points, 86, for a first-time player for the Irish team;
- Calum Maclean's was the best hat;
- Grattan MacGiffin had the best overall team kit.

Addendum:

To explain a bit more about the tableaux on the front page of this newsletter: the Tunnock's bear was given as a prize for the forthcoming Scottish National Championships; the 'balls' are Tunnock's Tea Cakes; the racquet is a limited edition one bearing the crest of HRH The Earl of Wessex.

The Earl graciously presented this purple-liveried Grays racquet to Radley when he visited as part of his World Challenge. The total he raised during his tennis court visits in 2018 was over £2m for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, of which he is Patron.

Future Events

Almost all events, tournaments and competitions planned for the next few months have been cancelled or postponed.

Scottish National Championships –

In mid-June, we are due to host the sixth Scottish National Championships, kindly sponsored, once again, by our friends at Pol Roger and Tunnock's. The whole event is, as you might expect, in doubt, although a final decision will be taken in May.

The 2020 Men's World Championship

As has been mentioned already, this highlight of the real tennis calendar has been pushed back to late October, when Camden Riviere will challenge Rob Fahey for the title of World Champion.

In the meantime, if you want to see a bit more of Camden on court, you could look at one of his coaching-tip videos:

<https://www.tennisandrackets.com/news/cams-corner>

Overseas Club News

Bordeaux -



The new court is in playable condition, although some work remains outstanding and the floor is being resurfaced. Various local authority checks have still to be completed before the court can be released to its owners, Le Jeu de Paume de Bordeaux. The date at which this will happen is uncertain and the Covid-19 crisis will cause further delays.

When play will be possible in Bordeaux is not clear but there is a great deal of enthusiasm for trips to visit the new court, when such travel is allowed.

The hope and expectation are that a permanent Professional will be appointed for the new season that will start in September 2020.

Chinon –

In a recent newsletter, there was a photo of the outside of an old tennis court, dating from 1587, in Vieux Chinon. As a follow-on to that, here is an artist's impression of the restored interior.



The architect, Martin Brunelle, imagines what tennis might look like in the future at the court in Chinon, though what the server is doing is something of a mystery...

The restoration project, being led by British expat, Simon Berry, is expected to cost at least Euros 1 million. Simon runs *Les Trois Tripots* tournament each year in SW France and is also playing a lead role in the project in Pau, to bring the tennis court there, built in 1887, back to permanent use for tennis. It is currently in daily use as a court for the game of *trinquet*, with *jeu de paume* only permitted at very limited times each week.

Rennes -



This old court in Rennes, France, has been converted into a 'citizens' space for gatherings'

Japan –

Last year, a visit to Dejima, the island in Nagasaki Bay that was created in the Edo Period as one of the very few places foreign traders might live, buy and sell, yielded something surprising; an information board about a ball game that features a penthouse. With apologies for the poor quality of the photo, the central panel is the most interesting, showing an illustration, now in the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture, of 'The Chinese and Dutch of Nagasaki'. They 'played a sport like badminton' say the sign writers. Hmm.



It has got to be a form of tennis, hasn't it?

*We look forward to getting you, and ourselves,
back on court as soon as possible!*

Stay well! Stay apart! Stay fit! Stay cheerful!

*This Newsletter, the second one of 2020,
was compiled by Maggie Henderson-Tew.*