

# Summer 2021

# Radley College Tennis Court

## Better Than The Last Club Newsletter

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This is a bumper Summer Edition of *Better Than The Last*, containing masses of significant news for Radley members, as well as for and from the wider community of Real Tennis.



**Relentlessly Positive  
Positively Relentless**

We are now properly back in business and while back-biting, back-stabbing and back-scratching remains the wearying norm in political circles, in the real tennis bubble there is a palpable sense of camaraderie, relief and optimism.

Singles and doubles are being enjoyed by dozens of players each week. The court is humming with activity, plus, there is the long-awaited bonus of the Sports Centre showers being available from Monday 19 July.

Since we re-opened on 12 April, we have been running close to capacity, with 12-14 hour days of continuous play each day, with the occasional 'off-peak' booking at 7am and 10pm to keep us on our toes.

The only blips have been the absence of bookings from 8pm on Wed 7 and on Sunday 11 July, when chasing after another sort of ball took temporary precedence, resulting in another heroic failure for the England soccer team.



Not nearly as thrilling as a real tennis ball

As those many players who have flocked back to the court know, it is a sad fact that, during the enforced breaks in play, real tennis has not got any easier.

In fact, it remains damned difficult, frustrating, exasperating, fascinating, enthralling and splendid - and that is why we keep coming back for more.

### **Welcome**

The charms of the game, and of playing at Radley, continue to entrance visitors and a number of people have joined the club since we re-opened in April.

Thus, we extend a very warm welcome to following new RCTC members: Florent Brethon, Bobby Burnett, Ben Geytenbeek, Andrew Hodgson, Mary Joyner, James Macdonald, Oliver Prittie and Simon Troughton.

Simon, by the way, will be the one in the eye-catching Cambridge 'Giraffe's' sweater, which has been brought out of long-term storage, where it has languished during Simon's approximate 45 year absence from the game since leaving university.

### **Not Welcome**

All are welcome. Did we say 'all'?



Even cars are keen to get on court at Radley these days, it seems. The one above only just failed to park inside the clubroom. The radiator of this vehicle, which seems to be fixed in quite an unnerving grin, mocked anyone who was not quite as thin as a wisp and who wanted to get in or get out.

### **Congratulations!**

The following Radley players have been invited to join or to remain with the British Real Tennis Academy, funded by The Dedanists and the T&RA:

Senior Squad - Benedict Yorston.

Development Squad - Florent Brethon, Magnus Garson and Henry Henman.

## **Other RCTC News**

### **A Visitor from France**

Regular readers of *Better Than The Last* will remember that Florent Brethon was part of the 'Radley +' team who worked in Bordeaux last summer, where he made a great contribution.

Double-vaccinated and PCR negative, Florent arrived in late June and will be seen on and off-court at Radley until mid-August. His visit will combine spending time improving his tennis with a month's work experience at the engineering company, Polar Technologies, in Eynsham.

Renewed thanks go to Hugo Axel-Berg for making the introduction which resulted in this valuable internship for Florent, which, he reports, has started extremely well.



Talented 18-year French player, Florent Brethon, is pictured above with Hugo Axel-Berg. To avoid any confusion, it is worth pointing out that HAB is the one on the right.

Since arriving, Florent has spent about 20 hours of court and chewed through two racquet re-strings. He is making the most of his time here and his performance is improving rapidly. He is most grateful to The Dedanists, who have extended support to him, as a promising young player.

### **Making RCTC (even) Better:** **The Fund-Raising Appeal**

#### **Refurbishment of the Club**

The school year is over and our plans for refurbishing the club have now received full approval from Radley College.

The first phase of the works are being scheduled and, at last, we are able to launch our fund raising campaign (see below) to coincide with the removal of most Covid-relating restrictions on 19 July.

Thank you for your patience! We are sorry that it has taken a good while to make this announcement, but we can now be more specific about the planned upgrade and the timetable of the project. Further details will be posted soon in the club room.

#### **Phase 1: The Club Room**

##### **The Plan:**

Refreshing and enhancing RCTC's ground and first floor club rooms, Pros' working space and the other areas of the club will:

- Allow us to provide better, more practical and more attractive facilities for our members and staff, consistent with the standing and style of Radley College and RCTC.
- Enable RCTC to use technology for its Members' benefit, through livestreaming and archiving on YouTube, which will enable the recording of coaching sessions and replay of tournament and special events.
- Continue to attract new members of all ages and abilities, encouraging greater school, student, young adult and female participation.

- Explore the potential for developing a variant of the game suited to those with disabilities. We want our wonderful game to be as inclusive as possible.

##### **The Timing:**

We are keen to proceed with the enhancements ASAP, although work cannot not commence until funding is in place or October, whichever is earlier. As any of you currently undertaking home maintenance and improvements will know, good tradespeople are in high demand and short supply. It is essential to have the right people to do the job and we have a great team lined-up to help us.

We will do our best to keep disruption to the minimum. Thus, the refurbishment will be done area by area over several months.

A Christmas Completion Party, perhaps?

##### **The Changes:**

The implementation of 'RTV-21' (being the nickname of the club's tech project), is moving ahead as the newsletter is being written (more below on this).

The non-tech developments that will be made will be aesthetical-pleasing and practical, with the objective of improving the facilities that we offer to our members and guests, while maintaining the atmosphere and style that we know is appreciated so much by players at Radley.

The appearance of the ground and first floor club rooms will change and be brought more in line with other well-used gathering spaces within Radley College in terms of colour scheme and materials: white, red, grey and oak. It will be redecorated and recarpeted throughout.

##### **NEW**

- There will be an area for changing shoes, storing kit bags and places for recharging your phone, laptop or other devices while you are on court.
- Seating will change and be flexible; capable of being turned easily to face the court or



towards the wall-mounted TV screen on which live and recorded play will be shown.

#### **NEW**

- We will be adding Honours Boards that will record the winners of the club's major competitions since the club opened in 2008

The events to be included are: The Charlie Hodgson Trophy, a.k.a. 'The Hangover Doubles'; the Club Doubles; the Club Handicap Singles; the Ladies' Singles; and the Men's Singles competitions).



The RCTC Ladies Singles Trophy and the Charlie Hodgson Trophy for Handicap Doubles

#### **NEW**

- We will improve the ventilation both upstairs and downstairs, not just because of Covid-19 (although that is a good enough reason), but also because we are planning to install an oven and hob in the kitchen upstairs.

#### **NEW**

- Crockery, glassware and cutlery will be upgraded, and all the cast-off furniture and other odds and ends that your Club Captain has shamelessly distributed around the club will disappear, as magic will be wrought in every direction.

It is oh-so-tempting to gush about the 'enhanced visitor experience', moving on to wax lyrical about the passion being invested in the project and finishing with hyperbolic assertions about the levels of excitement felt by all those involved. No. Just no.

Let us keep a sense of perspective and remember that, although we are not interior designers, fashionistas or style gurus (at least, I am not!), we are players of the Game of Kings and the King of Games and should behave accordingly; by keeping cool heads and not allowing ourselves to get too carried away - while not being shy of exhibiting a little flamboyance.

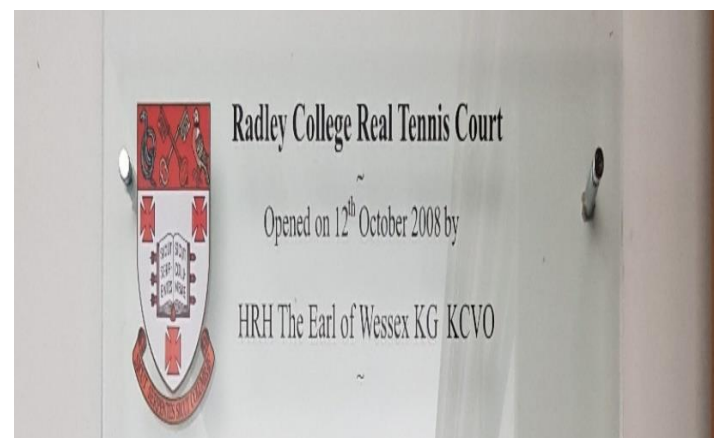
Notwithstanding the above, it must be said that the club is going to be so darned lovely when it is finished that we will need to do something to celebrate the transformation. Dates and details will follow on this event(s), and well as any donor-related activities to be announced in due course.

For the absence of doubt:

All social events related to the Refurbishment project will be funded personally by the Club Captain and **none** of the monies raised by the Appeal will be spent in this way.

We look forward to combining our celebrations with these notable anniversaries in the 2021/22 season:

- The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CJR's appointment as a Real Tennis Professional, in September 1971.
- The opening of the court 13 years ago by HRH The Earl of Wessex.



- The 175<sup>th</sup> (the Septuagintaquinguecentennial, for those who prefer such terms, although it does not trip very easily off the tongue!) anniversary of the founding of St Peter's (Radley) College.

What an Autumn there is in prospect at the Radley College Tennis Club!

Our immediate priority is the improvement of the entire ground floor and the first floor of the club. Details of the other phases of the club's full refurbishment project will follow in due course, but are outlined below:

### **Phase 2: The Dedans**

- Upgrading of seating and carpet, redecoration, and installation of AV equipment

### **Phase 3: Under the Penthouse**

- Upgrading of carpet, redecoration and removal of clutter.

NOTE – It is disappointing that the repairs to the Grille surround lasted so short a time, and we are conscious that the court needs patching up in several places. The scheduling of these on-court works is a separate matter of planning and funding.

## **Appeal for Funds**

We are asking our esteemed and beloved RCTC Members to help us raise an amount of at least £25,000 and up to £50,000 over the next three months.

These monies will enable us to realise all the phases of off-court improvements and to support future maintenance and related expenditure. The greater the sum we can raise, the more can be reserved to ensure that the club facilities can be maintained to the highest standards for the foreseeable future.

These are significant sums of money but are needed to provide facilities of an appropriate standard for our members, the club staff, Radley College and our visitors.

Funds raised will cover the costs of Phase 1 of the refurbishment and, we hope, Phases 2 and 3, without the need to ask for more. Who wants to do that?



"Please, Sir..." (and Madam)

## **Why Renovate?**

The club has had continuous use over an extremely successful period of thirteen years since it opened in 2008. The wear and tear caused by such heavy utilisation has starting to show, and from the carpets to the state of the paintwork, it is clearly an appropriate time to renew, refresh and refurb.

## **Why Donate?**

1. To enable three phases of improvement to be made by supplementing the resources of Radley College. The Real Tennis Club needs to be responsible for realising its vision of its future. The demands of the Covid-19 pandemic have been huge on the College, as they have on so many

institutions and organisations, not to mention individuals.

The extra costs of operating the school, and the reduction of income, runs well into seven figures over the period of the pandemic. This high cost is the result of unending Covid-related expenditure, the necessary discounting of fees and the loss of valuable out-of-term lettings revenue.

2. In the 13 years of the court's existence, we have never before asked our Members for any type of extra financial help. We welcome and appreciate your support now in significantly improving the appearance at the club and the range of facilities offered.

### How to Donate?

## THE RADLEY FOUNDATION

Any and all donations will be channelled through *The Radley Foundation* (being ring-fenced for the 'Real Tennis Appeal'). This means that your donation can be Gift-Aided, to the considerable advantage of individual donors and the project.

We are most grateful to the College Foundation for being so accommodating and allowing us to structure our Appeal in this way. There is a dedicated page on their website for giving to this appeal: <https://www.radley.org.uk/support-us/real-tennis>.

Donors may make gifts by credit/debit card online, by bank transfer or by cheque. For all these methods, Radley College (and therefore, also RCTC) can seek Gift Aid, thus boosting the value of each gift. For those preferring not to make donations online, forms are available on the club notice board or from the Pros or by emailing [maggie.ht@btinternet.com](mailto:maggie.ht@btinternet.com).

### When to Donate?

Donations to the Appeal can be made NOW.

CJR wishes to start the ball rolling and has donated £1000 to the Appeal. He is Donor 1.

MH-T has pledged to fund any events, parties or celebrations to mark the opening of the new facilities. She is Donor 2.

Donors 3 and 4 are Nino Merola and his partner, Tori Toates.



### **Please play your part!**

We hope that every Member of the club will want to get involved and will feel able to make some sort of contribution, large or small, to our Refurbishment Appeal.

In recent *Better Than The Last* newsletters, we mused about the possibility of Members donating to the Appeal the amount of their annual subscription that the College generously elected NOT to debit from their account because of the Covid closures.

This idea was picked up by many members who immediately offered to take this action. A note of thanks was sent to each offeror and, as we are now ready to accept donations, we will write again to these individuals. As helpful as this form of donation will be (and we hope that every RCTC Member will feel able to give at least this amount), we need to raise significantly more money to complete our programmes of works.

## A Visitor from London

Graham Tomkinson of the Dedanists brought over a prototype ball-serving machine on Friday 9 July, set it up and showed the Pros how it works.

It may resemble something capable of making a lunar landing, but it was immediately apparent that this machine has considerable terrestrial value. It can deliver balls of the same line, length and speed consistently, which gives it considerable value as a coaching aid.

The machine was built under Graham's supervision at Brunel University, as an adaptation of a cricket bowling machine, and it can be finely adjusted for spin, direction and speed.

This machine has been gathering dust at Lord's during Covid lockdowns and has been moved to RCTC on an open-ended basis, for extended trials and use.



For all its fine qualities and value, there are some drawbacks. It is quite a lengthy process to set the ball machine up and to dismantle it after use and we estimate that an hour's court time would be reduced by at least 20 minutes by the process.

The machine could be extremely dangerous if used incorrectly, as it can fire balls out at a top speed of 99mph.

Lastly, it causes increased wear to the balls and, after it has been used, the area around it will need sweeping. An unexpected consequence of the wear the machine puts on the balls is that it actually makes them cleaner, so it is not all bad news.

As it will take a while to assess the optimal way of using the ball machine, trials are underway during some 9-10pm slots, as the court must be swept anyway before the next day's play.

If you would like to try out this intriguing bit of kit, with the help and advice that is essential, please let the Pros know.

## College Tennis

The College boys returned to Radley on 19 April for the Summer Term and have used the court during reserved times, with several boys playing club members or fellow pupils outside these hours. It has been terrific to see so many keen juniors on court.

Although the academic year is over, we look forward to the start of the next school year, as well as the next tennis season, in September. We fervently hope that 2021/22 will be a near-normal year.

## Club Tournament News

After a season and a bit with barely any inter-club matches or tournaments, we are delighted to announce their imminent return with the following challenge match.

Chris Lintott's brainchild, The RSPB Tournament, will be held at Radley on Saturday 21 August. This RSPB should not be confused with the *other* RSPB, the largest wildlife member organisation in the UK. Our RSPB is the Radley Society for the Preservation of *Bisques*, those endangered, poorly understood, often misused, but noble, enduring and arcane f(cr)eatures of the handicapping system.





A Radley side will again take on teams from Oxford and East Anglia (combining Cambridge and Prested Hall) and elsewhere, for raucous fun, plentiful food and the challenge of retaining the most kitch trophy in the Radley cabinet, Big-Mouthed Larry The Lobster.

Beware of Larry's singing and of the more punitive rules of the tournament, for both of which we can thank Prof. Lintott, who has a particular brand of imaginative cruelty.



The tournament was last staged in 2019 and the players in the winning Radley team will be offered a chance to reprise their success before remaining places in the side will be up for grabs. If playing in this event appeals to you, please contact Maggie on

[maggie.ht@btinternet.com](mailto:maggie.ht@btinternet.com) and she will add your name to the waiting list.

## National Tournament News

### **The Varsity Match, 2021**

After multiple postponements, Lords hosted the Varsity Real Tennis Match on Friday 2 and Saturday 3 July, its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. The first match took place in 1859 (making it the third oldest Varsity match), with gaps in 1864 and during the years of the World Wars.

Use this link to watch the match on YouTube:

<https://www.tennisandrackets.com/news/150th-real-tennis-varsity-2021>.

Covid took its toll on the well-established and much-loved off-court celebrations, but Pol Roger, the generous sponsors of this event for so many years, provided a champagne reception of the players in the garden beside the court, which was hosted, with his customary verve, by James Simpson MW, the MD of Pol Roger Ltd and avid tennis player.



The women and men of the Dark Blues extended their unbeaten records since 2017 with further wins over the respective Cambridge sides. The Oxford women won 6-0 but the men had a tougher time, and the tight encounter went to a deciding doubles.



In this match, Radley member Benedict Yorston added to his singles win with considerable heroics. He and Rory Giddins beat Ed Hyde and Patrick Smart 6-1, 6-3.

### The BTM Invitational – Leamington

Nino has particularly asked me not to draw attention to this one-off event, organised by Ben Taylor-Matthews, which is being staged over the weekend of 17/18 July. He does not want it advertised that all the action will be livestreamed from Leamington from 10am each day and that you can keep up with the play via the club's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ8NxrUQiVdJq9QqmcizMDA>.

These players are in action on Sat 17 July:

<i>Player</i>	<i>Club</i>	<i>Handicap</i>
Chris Aley	Leamington	17.8
Tom Bomford	Leamington	13.6
James Law	Hatfield	16.0
Jez Brodie	Hyde	19.5

Please, on Sunday 18th July, Nino asks that you do not tune in and support him when he takes on three other Pros, including Levi Gale, but I may not be able to resist...

<i>Player</i>	<i>Club</i>	<i>Handicap</i>
Nino Merola	Radley	13.4
Adam Player	Wellington	12.6
Levi Gale	Oratory/Holyport	10.4
Louis Gordon	Petworth	8.8

### The British Junior Real Tennis Championships 2021

All eligible juniors are encouraged to enter the age range categories (U12, U14, U16 and U18) of this tournament, which will be held at Queen's Club from 20-22 August. Entry forms can be obtained from the Pros or downloaded from the T&RA website.



### Next season 2021/22

Happily, arrangements have already begun for tournament play in the 2021/22 season, beginning in September with the T&RA 2021 Category Tournaments, from B (H10-19, at The Hyde from 17-19 September) through to G (handicaps over 60, which will be played at The Oratory from 3-5 Sept). Different handicap bands play level at different courts.

Here is a link to the page on the T&RA website that provides more detail and the separate entry forms: <https://www.tennisandrackets.com/news/t-ra-category-tournaments-2021>.

### **Other UK Club News**

#### **Latest liP Apprentice**

Three months ago, we reported on the arrival of Jack Josephs at Middlesex and now we can tell you about the second and third Apprentices under this Investing in Professionals programme.

*'WRTC is very pleased to welcome Alex Machin to the Real Tennis team at Wellington. Alex first started playing Real Tennis at 15 through his local school and has successfully applied for a apprenticeship through the Investing in Professionals (liP) programme.'*

*Alex has just finished his A levels, is already a level 3 LTA coach and starts work at WRTC in late August. Congratulations, Alex, we look forward to seeing you on court at Wellington and elsewhere.'*

Seacourt is continuing to be a source of professional talent. William Flynn, who grew up playing real tennis at the club, has recently given up his college course to focus exclusively on developing his career as a tennis professional. He has worked part-time at Seacourt for more than a year but will now join the paid staff, as a result of his acceptance onto the liP scheme.

### **International Club News**

#### **Australia –**

##### **Hobart:**

One of our regular overseas correspondents, Mike Garnett, recently wrote to tell us that:

*'One of ARTA's best lady amateur players (and former Aust. Amateur Champion) Barbara Baker has just been appointed Governor of Tasmania.'*



*Barbara was formerly a Judge in the Federal Court. Henceforth, she will be referred to as Her Excellency and will move, with her husband, into the Governor's magnificent official residence, Government House.*

*She takes over from Professor Kate Warner, also well known within the royal tennis world (and sister of Dick Friend, who frequently plays at both Melbourne and Hobart). Barbara's father, Bob Baker, was one of the best amateur players at Hobart in the 1950's.'*

You may or may not know that Radley member, Miles Buckinghamshire (the Earl of Buckinghamshire) has the subsidiary title of 'Lord Hobart' and has many strong connections with the city through his family history.

Miles tells us that he has had the pleasure of billeting with the incumbent Governor during visits to Hobart on tennis tours, which sounds like fun.

From the photo of Government House below, it looks as if it might quite easily be somewhere in or close to Oxfordshire, rather than nearly 11,000 miles away.



### More news from Hobart...

Considerable interest has been expressed by more than one of our members about acquiring the unique Real Table Tennis Table, lovingly crafted by Hobart club member, John Herbert. It needs a new home, but, sadly, we doubt whether this will be outside Tasmania. Enquiries have ascertained that the cost of dismantling, packing and shipping this sturdy piece would be considerable in excess of A\$2,000.

Your Editor wants one of these tables. Badly. Very badly. In the current circumstances, a visit by John Herbert to Radley to make one on site (which he has most kindly offered to do) seems unlikely anytime soon. A splendid alternative seemed to be taking a trip to the College's Design & Technology Department, to discuss the idea of a table like this becoming a DT project for one or more of the boys.

Assent was given, and Matthew Anderson, a current Sixth Former (and one of the keenest of the College's real tennis-playing cohort), is turning his DT skills to the construction of a Real Table Tennis.

Matthew will be able to start work as soon as a suitable table can be found for him to use as the base of the construction.

If you have an old table-tennis table, languishing in a shed, garage or dark corner, which you would be willing to donate for this worthy cause, please let Maggie know on [maggie.ht@btinternet.com](mailto:maggie.ht@btinternet.com).



We wish Matthew well and look forward very much to playing on the finished court/table, which we hope may find a home in the clubroom at some point.

### Sydney –

Splendid news has come to us in the past few days about the Sydney Real Tennis Club, from James Willis, the Club Captain, who writes:

*After many years of hard work, Sydney Real Tennis Club's DA application to build a new real tennis court at Cheltenham Recreational Club, in Sydney's Northwest, has been approved.*

*The club is now entering an exciting phase of fundraising to ensure building work can begin on the real tennis world's newest court.*

*For further information on progress to date and plans for funding and building the new court, have a look at the club's website, on:*  
[https://www.sydneyrealtennis.com.au/?mc\\_cid](https://www.sydneyrealtennis.com.au/?mc_cid).





We wish great good luck to the fund-raising effort and look forward to a court in Sydney rapidly following the completion of the new ones in Washington and Charleston.

#### Holland –

Sadly, travel complexities have put paid to the annual and most welcome influx of players from Holland for 'Dutch Week' at Radley in August.



In the absence of in-person updates from NRTB players at Radley, we will continue to rely on the regular emails from Cees de Bondt and his colleagues to keep us up to date with the new court project in The Hague. He tells us that no substantive progress will be made until next Spring, at the earliest, because of the latest round of local government elections and the arrival of the fresh City Council in April 2022. In the meantime, influencing continues unabated.

#### USA –

##### Charleston:

A fund-raising event for the new court, to be constructed at the Daniel Island Country Club outside Charleston, took place on Sunday 13 June at The Tuxedo Club, which has long had strong links with the Aiken club and South Carolina. Many of the turn-of-the-nineteenth century super-rich who had properties on the Tuxedo estate also owned lavish houses in South Carolina where they 'wintered'; playing tennis, polo and partying.

Greg Van Schaack, one of the main drivers of the Charleston court initiative, reports that two recent fundraising events have been held; the first in Tuxedo, followed by the second in NYC. He reports that around \$100K was raised between these two events, which means that they are only about \$150K shy of the funding target.

Greg writes that: 'With guarantees and loans, we should start building this Fall,' which is tremendously good news for this long-running .

##### Washington

The future:

Head Pro, Ivan Ronaldson, gives us encouraging news from Prince's Court in Washington. He tells us that a number of members of the Westwood Country Club (where the court that will replace Prince's will be built) have come along to try out this old-fangled game, and to steal a march on their peers by learning the rules before they do.

The past:

Haven Pell, a.k.a. 'The Pundicator' (here is the link to his website and blog: <https://pundicator.com/>) had produced a splendidly informative article, detailing the history of the recent handicap system.

If you would like to read the full story of how RTO comes to be owned by the international governing associations of the game, then read on.

**'AROUND THE WORLD IN 50 COURTS –  
INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND MAKING  
MATCHES COMPETITIVE, ALL WHILE  
AVOIDING DISTRACTING ADVERTISEMENTS**

*There is good and bad about playing a small game. By now, you have seen much of the good. Players of small games are more enthusiastic and see themselves as integral to its very existence. After years of involvement, you have met many of the players from other countries and perhaps stayed in their houses and they in yours. You might even have written about it.*

*But there is a downside: the fewer the players, the less likely it is that there will be enough of them who play at your level. You have to be more open minded about those with and against whom you play.*

*Like golf, the solution to making matches competitive is handicaps.*

*For a time, handicaps were determined by one's home court professional, but this was haphazard. Not only did the different pros apply different standards, but they also felt pressure to adjust handicaps in ways that kept members happy.*

*Fortunately, most players have sufficient egos that they want their handicaps to be lower so they will feel better about themselves. A few, of course, want their handicaps to be higher so they will win more tournaments. These people are known as bandits, and they are looked upon with disfavor.*

*There were a few years when the entire United States was out of kilter with the rest of the world because one former great could not bear the idea of his handicap going up as he grew older. He was pegged at 18 and the rest of the country was adjusted around him. As his "18" became the equivalent of a 25 or a 30 in other countries, Americans became less and less competitive.*

*Here is how the handicap system works in court tennis. It all depends on the odds of one player – me – winning a point against another player – you. For this example, you are a little better than me, so you are likely to win four points out of seven. We*

*solve that by letting me start each game at 15. I only need to win three points (30, 40, game) while you need to win four (15, 30, 40, game). Should a game be tied at 40 all, we play just one point to decide it because playing more points (deuce, advantage) favors the better player.*

*Yes, our scoring system is just like tennis or, more accurately, theirs is just like ours because we got there first. With the handicap, each of us is likely to win about the same number of games and we will end up with very close sets even though we are of different abilities.*

*Like so many things, the computer was the solution to the problem of the pros assigning handicaps that were either too high or too low. After adjusting for possible home court advantage, all the computer asks is did you beat me, or did I beat you (and what handicap did we use).*

*If you won, your handicap goes down and mine goes up. Over time, we should all get to the right level and have close matches even if you have to start at minus 15 and I started at plus 15. Yes, the player disparities can be sufficient for one player to begin each game below zero.*

*Golf is different. You play against the course. Your opponent's skill has no bearing on how you do. Each course is professionally evaluated to determine its level of difficulty relative to all other courses. If you play well on a particular day, the course doesn't care. All that happens is that your handicap goes down, and you get fewer handicap strokes the next time out. Conversely, if you play badly, the course beats you by more than expected and your handicap goes up, so you get more handicap strokes in the next round.*

*In court tennis, your handicap is determined by two factors: how well or badly you played; and how well or badly your opponent played.*

*Two players can have their best days ever on a golf course and both of their handicaps will go down. The same two players can have their best days ever in court tennis, but one will lose, and his handicap will go up. Over time that tends to even itself out.*

*In court tennis, everyone has a handicap, and all of the data are kept in a computer called Real Tennis Online or RTO. Today, there are just under 12,000 of us. For part of its life, the RTO computer was located in Ballarat, Australia, and it was operated on sort of a volunteer basis by Tim Graham, a player who had the requisite programming skills.*

*In the spring of some year, likely between 2004 and 2006, I opened a bill from our country club here in Washington and noticed a line item called handicap fee. It was \$25. (Please keep that figure some place handy in your mind.) I asked the head golf professional if anyone had ever objected to the charge.*

*“No,” he said. “Do you think it is too high?”*

*I didn’t, but my mind was elsewhere. Court tennis players were paying virtually nothing for handicaps and there were at the time about 10,000 of us. What if our friend in Ballarat, who did it as a labor of love, decided to sell the program to someone who wanted to charge each of us the entirely fair price of \$25 per year? The handicap system could easily be worth \$2 million. (I discussed this at some length with an investment banker.)*

*Uh Oh!*

*To say nothing of the fact that we had no control whatever over the website or the software itself. “What if Tim Graham (our handicap system manager) gets hit by a bus?” became a significant part of many conversations I was having as Chairman of the United States Court Tennis Preservation Foundation.*

*There was also the unpleasant prospect of an owner of the handicap system selling ads on the website as is now done in golf. Given the older male court tennis demographic, you can let your mind wander as to what companies might choose to advertise their products. I doubt it will take you very long.*

*With no authority whatever, I contacted Graham and we talked on the phone and by email. He was tiring of the current arrangement and was open to the idea of selling the handicap system to the game.*

*He also mentioned that the Honorary Treasurer (the title for the volunteer finance person) of the Tennis & Rackets Association (the game’s UK governing body) had been having similar conversations with him. Graham suggested that we talk.*

*And thus, did I first meet James Walton, a player of roughly similar ability and a really clear thinker. Walton lives in a beautiful village called Sutton Courtenay in Oxfordshire.*

*We had several conversations about the RTO handicap system and concluded more or less immediately that the game had no choice but to buy it, lest it fall into unfriendly hands.*

*Politics suggested that no one country could buy it without raising eyebrows in the other three, because court tennis lacks a distinguished tradition of cooperation among the four national governing bodies. The players do fine but the countries less so. National noses get out of joint faster than individual noses. Fortunately, this situation is improving as the cost of communication and travel decrease.*

*We began discussions with Graham and arrived at a price relatively easily. The challenge became allocating the ownership among the United Kingdom, France, Australia and the United States. We chose a worldwide percentage-of-players formula in which UK would have 60%, Australia and the United States 17 1/2% each and France 5%. This approximated the share of players in each country.*

*Walton was able to keep the UK “on side” because of his position on the board, and I kept the US “on side” by not telling anyone what we were doing. Thanks to its status as a tax-exempt charity, the Foundation held most of the cash available to the game in the United States.*

*Australia was a bit trickier because their \$15,000 or \$20,000 share of the purchase price was not immediately available. It would only work if spread over two years.*

*Though the amount in question was minuscule – maybe \$3000 to \$5000 — France balked. On one*



*visit to Paris, I had one of the most vitriolic conversations ever to be had in sidewalk café. In the end, we had to find a way around their designated spokesman and reduce their share from 5% to 2%, but the deal got done and now all four countries jointly control an important component of the game.*

*There was one other hurdle. Though the US cash would be provided by the Foundation, it was well outside our purview to make an international decision on behalf of the United States.*

*The US Court Tennis Association had been formed in 1955 and was possessive of its primacy. The US Court Tennis Preservation Foundation was nearly 40 years younger but had the ability to raise money as a charity. Since its inception, the Foundation has undertaken several significant fund-raising campaigns.*

*Graham and Walton flew to Washington, and we set the final terms in the garden of my house then went to play tennis together. Walton and I then travelled to New York for a meeting of the US Court Tennis Association where the entire matter would finally be made public.*

*It did not go well.*

*Of course, there were accusations of “not staying in my lane.” Entirely accurate, I might add.*

*The most adamant of the board members tried to dismiss us from the meeting after our presentation saying, “we’ll form a committee and get back to you.”*

*“You can’t,” said Walton (if possible a little less politic than me and definitely with far less at stake).*

*“Why” asked the board member.*

*“Because we already bought it.”*

*That lead to an extremely awkward silence, but sometimes it is just better to ask forgiveness than permission.*

*Note: Remember how I asked you to keep the \$25 golf handicap fee in mind? About 15 years later, the same fee at the same country club is \$45. Had we not moved expeditiously, the court tennis handicap system might have been worth \$4 million rather than \$2 million. The price we paid was less than \$100,000. And there are no male enhancement products advertised on the website.*

*The definitive agreement was signed at a lovely ceremony in the spring of 2008 during the World Championship Fontainebleau. Our hosts could not have been more gracious, and they provided champagne to celebrate the occasion of international cooperation for the benefit of the game.*

*As seems to happen in many transactions, the bargaining positions were quickly forgotten, and the benefits continue to be enjoyed by all of the world’s players.’*



Haven has played a pivotal role in the funding of the new court at the Westwood Country Club, as he did twenty-five years ago when the current Washington court was built. He is indefatigable and his contribution to Court Tennis in the US has been, and continues to be, immense.

The latest news of the new build project at the Westwood Country Club is as follows:

The agreements between Westwood Country Club and the US Court Tennis Preservation Foundation have been signed.

- The \$3.2 million needed by March 1 was raised, with about six weeks to spare.
- The building permits are expected in July, after which ground will be broken.
- The steel building in which the three lawn tennis courts and the court tennis court will be housed is scheduled for delivery on 25 August.
- Completion of construction is planned for April 2022.

### **In the Media**

#### **RTC:**

The Real Tennis court at Hampton Court Palace was featured on Channel 5 on 23 May in an episode of 'Cruising with Jane McDonald' in which Jane was introduced to Real Tennis by long-time RTC Pro and former British Ladies Champion, Lesley Ronaldson, as part of the tour of the Palace she gave to these visitors.

Les coped admirably with Ms McDonald, who has a style all of her own (see below, and cringe...):

[https://www.my5.tv/cruising-with-jane-mcdonald/season-7/312f6ab7-a6d6-446c-9611-646bef860d8f?fbclid=IwAR1fENJeeC4v6NCa\\_6MRwnyNusVvP-VZnJElyw0SP4IQemJZxuYDYh-Wvfl](https://www.my5.tv/cruising-with-jane-mcdonald/season-7/312f6ab7-a6d6-446c-9611-646bef860d8f?fbclid=IwAR1fENJeeC4v6NCa_6MRwnyNusVvP-VZnJElyw0SP4IQemJZxuYDYh-Wvfl).



#### **Paris:**

There has been an appearance of the Paris court and club on a video blog, entitled 'Misha's Mission'. While the identity of Misha and the nature and purpose of his mission remains a mystery (and is presumably a simple matter of the irresistible appeal of assonance and alliteration rather than having a specific meaning), readers may nevertheless be interested in seeing the clip: <https://vimeo.com/559891217/f1e75140d6?fbclid=IwAR36fsRneImZQ9LoyMmLUBFyOItolUXKarbdaJlyh71HTSYHV1qMd0dS2q8>.

#### **New Real Tennis Website:**

Nick Jones, from Seacourt, has come up with the idea of creating a website that can act as the single repository of knowledge of all things related to real tennis. What a splendid idea!

'RT42' is so named because this is the numbers of clubs with courts in play, but also because, as Douglas Adams taught us, '42' is the answer to THE QUESTION; the one about life, the universe and everything.

More is explained below:

# RT42 WEBSITE COMING SOON!

**Mission**  
Information, Innovation and Inspiration for all 42 places in the world which have a Real Tennis court.

**Team**  
The editorial board is Rob Fahey, Nick Jones, Colm O'Shea and Rachael Robinson (web design).

George Peel will be working full-time on the project until September.

### **Delivery**

Primarily this website - linked to this site are social media accounts on [Instagram @rtfortytwo](#) and [Twitter @rtfortytwo](#) - these accounts are up and running, so please follow them for updates.

### **Launch**

The plan is to launch at the end of the summer with access to all without restrictions.

### **What can I do to help?**

Ideas - what you would like to know or have access to

Ideas - information and assistance that you get asked for

Anything you would like us to link to or share with the Real Tennis community

*Any ideas or thoughts you have would be greatly appreciated.*

### **How do I contact RT42?**

You can email us via [admin@rt42.org](mailto:admin@rt42.org), message us via the social media accounts in the usual way or contact any of the editorial board directly.

### **A Reminder**

A final reminder that the club's account for court and lesson fees and shop items changed some months ago, to:

***Radley College Leisure Ltd - Real Tennis***

***Sort code: 60-01-01***

***Account number: 46625836***

*This Newsletter, the last of the 2020-2021 season, was compiled by Maggie Henderson-Tew, Club Captain.*

### **The Last Gallery**

No edition of *Better Than The Last* would be complete without a picture-related item to finish.

The photo below shows 'Team Radley +' on court in Bordeaux a year ago, playing that dangerous hybrid game, Triples.

Happily, no one was killed, which is particularly surprising given that CJR appears to be in the process of executing a cunning scoop shot for the Winning Gallery while Henry and Mike Henman have their backs turned, and Benedict Yorston, the third Receiver, stands on guard at the back of the court.



The players are, from north to south, Benedict Yorston, Mike Henman, Henry Henman, CJR, Florent Brethon and Lea Van Der Zwalmen.

From memory, it was about 40C on court that day, which makes the high 20s we expect over the next few days seem moderate by comparison.

Enjoy the weather and your tennis!



