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Press Release

TIM HENMAN JOINS LAWN TENNIS ASSOCIATION CELEBRATIONS OF 50 YEARS OF OPEN ERA TENNIS AT WEST HANTS CLUB

Wimbledon semi-finalist and former British No.1 Tim Henman joined a host of other tennis stars past and present in Bournemouth today, as part of the Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) celebrations marking 50 years since the very first Open Era tournament.

On April 22 1968, the seaside town's West Hants Tennis Club hosted The British Hard Court Championships, the first of 12 Open tournaments for the year sanctioned by the then International Lawn Tennis Federation (ILTF). The tournament marked the birth of modern-day professional tennis and led to today's multi-million dollar global industry defined by Grand Slam events and superstar players.

Scott Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Lawn Tennis Association said:

"Today really is a momentous occasion for British Tennis and recognising the path it helped pave for professional players around the world. Marking this anniversary back at the West Hants Club with some of history's greatest tennis players has been very special. The LTA helped initiate a legacy that truly changed the game and one that future players will continue to benefit from throughout their lives.

Henman took part in the LTA's celebrations alongside players from the first Open Era tournament in 1968, including Sue Mappin, Frances McLennan, John Clifton and John Paish to play exhibition matches alongside future stars of British Tennis.

Henman who turned professional in 1993 and retired in 2007 after an illustrious career in the game said:

"Players of my generation owe a great debt of gratitude to the LTA and those players who 50 years ago ushered in the professional era for our sport – it was a huge game changer for players and tennis across the world."

"It was great to be part of the celebrations today at West Hants in Bournemouth where it all began in 1968 and to get on court with some of the players who took part in that ground breaking tournament."

They were joined by West Hants Chief Executive Peter Elviss and Chairman Edwin Bessant, Chairman of the All England Tennis Club, Philip Brook, LTA President David Rawlinson and ITF COO Kelly Fairweather, to commemorate the role the LTA and West Hants Club together played in paving the way for professional tennis across the globe.

West Hants Tennis Club Chief Executive, Peter Elviss added:

“It’s incredible to think that our club was at the centre of such an important development for the sport. It was something that changed the tennis landscape forever and we are proud to celebrate this with many of those who were part of that great change at the time but also with the potential next generation of British Tennis stars.”

Fifty years ago, the first Open Era titles were won by Australia’s Ken Rosewall and Britain’s Virginia Wade, who took home the first ever prize money breakdowns recorded on a draw sheet – the men’s title with £1000 and the women’s £300.

This year also marks a number of other notable landmarks in the history of tennis, including the 130th anniversary of the founding of the LTA and the 40th anniversary of the first-ever BBC broadcast of the Eastbourne International – which saw Martina Navratilova beat Chris Evert two weeks ahead of her maiden Wimbledon title. 2018 will also mark the 40th consecutive year the BBC have televised the Queen’s Club Championships, which started in 1979.

To find out more about the Open Era and the evolution of tennis in the past 50 years, visit www.lta.org.uk/news/general-news/2018/april/open-era-british-tennis-celebrates-50th-anniversary-of-the-open-era

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ABOUT THE LTA

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) is the National Governing Body for tennis in Great Britain, responsible for developing and promoting the sport, with a mission to get more people playing tennis more often. It does this under the consumer brand of British Tennis, by working with a broad range of partners and over 25,000 volunteers, to grow the game in communities, clubs and schools. The LTA represents the interests of over 590,000 British Tennis Members, men and women, girls and boys across the country, playing on more than 23,000 courts. The LTA runs and supports a network of 11,500 approved tournaments for players of all ages, the corner-stones of which are the premier grass court events leading up to Wimbledon: the Nature Valley Open at Nottingham, the Nature Valley Classic at Birmingham, the Fever-Tree Championships at Queens Club and the Nature Valley International Eastbourne. The LTA works with many delivery partners to grow the sport across the country. One of these is its charitable entity, the Tennis Foundation, to provide a tennis provision for more than 20,000 schools, disadvantaged youth as well as promoting tennis as an inclusive sport for anyone with a disability. For further information about the LTA and British Tennis, and to review the British Tennis strategy for 2015 – 2019 visit www.lta.org.uk or follow us on Twitter @BritishTennis.

THE STORY OF OPEN ERA TENNIS

It was when the legendary Australian champion Rod Laver agreed to turn pro in 1962, with some of his fellow pros under contract to Jack Kramer, including Rosewall, helping to fund it, that the ILTF realised that a review of the current rules were inevitable. Those who did turn up were banned from playing in the four major tournaments (Australia, France, Wimbledon and the United States). Laver, who had won all four major championships in 1962, did not play in the majors again until 1968.

This historic seachange in tennis took place following an impassioned speech from the LTA’s Councillor for Kent, Derek Penman, at the Lawn Tennis Association’s AGM at The Queen’s Club on December 14, 1967. Tennis was traditionally an amateur sport with only a few turning professional – usually the best amateur of each year. Prompted by the protests by professionals against the many competitors, who pretended to be amateurs, while accepting under-the-table payments, in a process branded ‘*shamaterusim*’.

Penman's speech resulted in unanimous AELTC support, which the then Chairman of Wimbledon, Herman David stated "it must be constitutional". Once the LTA had passed a motion for an open Wimbledon in 1968 LTA Chairman Derek Hardwick then proposed that Britain should abolish the distinction between amateur and professional players at British tournaments.

With support from Herman David, Hardwick and Penman sought to gain international support over the next three months and travelled around the world garnering support from the US and other nations. After an emergency meeting of the ILTF member nations in Paris on March 30 1968, the Open tournaments were sanctioned, and the British Hard Court Championships was the first to be played in this era.