



Report of the Seniors Tennis GB Council for 2021

With the ongoing pandemic, 2021 was another extremely challenging year for everyone. Seniors Tennis GB (STGB) has continued to work to promote and support tennis activity for over 35s and was able to resume most, but not all, activities.

Raising the profile for tennis as lifelong game for seniors/adults 35+

In 2021 STGB further built on their commitment to raise the profile of Seniors Tennis and engage more players in our events and competitions; notably marketing the expanded National Seniors inter-club competition, now promoted under the LTA National League banner, and supporting the launch of the new one-day Fast4 events. This in addition to extensive growth in social media, both in post frequency and engagement, covering all areas and always welcoming suitable news and features from the ever-growing Seniors constituency.

A special initiative, encouraged and supported by LTA, saw a short *About Seniors Tennis GB* presentation available for sharing at all County AGMs, mostly via Senior County Organisers able to 'localise' the content whilst reminding their counties and clubs of the range of opportunities available for all 35s + adults.

Future developments include further work with the LTA on website redesign as well as joint promotions on new products and initiatives particularly around the roll-out of the new World Tennis Number (WTN). This is set to be a prime attraction for players in all senior competitions giving them the opportunity to see weekly progress in their WTN for both Singles and Doubles!

Seniors' Participation Tennis Programme

STGB has run an initiative in association with the LTA and a number of County Associations since 2015, designed to encourage more adults over 30 years old to play more tennis more often. Ideas to encourage adults to take up tennis and keep playing have been allocated grants

for the club or facility to help develop tennis programmes. Sadly due to COVID-19 the 2020 scheme was cancelled.

In 2021 STGB and the LTA ran a different scheme with grants offered of £100 to put towards encouraging recreational competition for seniors and to support the introduction of the new ITF World Tennis Number scheme. Funding went towards sustainable schemes in 17 counties, Wales and Scotland. Plans for 2022 are being considered and are likely to be similar offering to that in 2021.

Fast4 Seniors – new in 2021

A Seniors category of one day tournaments was added to the LTA's Fast4 Competitions programme. This pilot scheme, initially for age groups 35 and 50, offers accessible competitive play as an alternative to week-long tournaments. Applications were received for 82 events from over 50 clubs/venues across the country but unfortunately not all were well-supported and completion numbers were disappointing. The pandemic may well have had an impact on entries. As this was the first year offering these competitions, applications are again being invited from clubs in 2022. There will be a greater focus on marketing and promotion to players to raise awareness of these local competition opportunities and encourage more entries.

International and Four Nations Competition

The World Championships in 2021 were held by the ITF but, on safety grounds and with the uncertainty of international travel, it was decided that GB would not send teams.

The ITF have announced dates for 2022 World Championships, the Super Seniors and Seniors events in Palm Beach, Florida. Teams have been selected with the assistance of Jo Shepherd, Women's Selector as well as the many Age Group Selectors, a massive thanks to all who contributed.

The popular Four Nations competition also had to be cancelled for 2021 but we are delighted to confirm that it is now scheduled to be held by Seniors Tennis GB for both Group A (35/45/50) in Wrexham and Group B (55/60/65) in Bolton in May 2022.

National Competitions - Seniors County Cup and Seniors National Club League

The Seniors County Cup, formerly known as the Seniors Inter-County competition, returned in 2021. Regionally based leagues were established to minimise distance travelled, avoiding the need for overnight accommodation. In view of the revised league structure, matches were played as friendlies with no promotion and relegation. The enthusiasm for competitive play was borne out with circa 480 teams and 3000 players taking part from the 35s August weekend events through the full range of age group fixtures played from April to October. The 2022 season sees a return to the league positions that were due to operate in 2020. We anticipate an uninterrupted season of competitive matches played in the usual good spirit.

The National League Seniors Inter Club competition re-started in 2021 and we were delighted so many teams entered across the 18, predominantly doubles, events. Under the circumstances, the finals were played at individual clubs which proved to be a great success and enjoyed by all players. We welcomed several new clubs this season though overall the number of teams was little changed. With a more encouraging landscape both for travel and club entertaining, we look to further grow entries in this popular team competition.

A challenge for captains of both the County Cup and the National League, however, was the difficulty in selecting the names of players from the competitions database when entering results. The LTA IT Department has been provided with written specifications of the problems and we anticipate they will be resolved before the start of the 2022 playing season.

We would like to acknowledge the excellent support that the LTA Competitions Team have provided in the promotion of both events and the administration of the Seniors County Cup competition. Our appreciation and thanks also to the age group co-ordinators of the Seniors National League competition and to the Senior County Organisers (SCOs) of every County Association for their help and patience.

The GB Seniors Circuit

Twenty-two ITF tournaments were scheduled to take place in 2021, but due to the various lockdowns the first to be held under the ITF's very strict Covid-19 Protocol was at Felixstowe in June. Entries were good for succeeding events, with players obviously keen for some

competition after such a long lay-off. The British Open Indoor Championships were rescheduled and took place in Wrexham in September.

New tournaments entered the Calendar at the Roehampton Club, Great Malvern, Ipswich and Newmarket, but the Indoor event at Ipswich could not be held due to the Covid regulations. The tournaments at Roehampton, Felixstowe and Cardiff have been upgraded to S200 for 2022 and upgrades for the newest S100 events are being applied for.

The schedule now contains our four major tournaments, the Indoor, Clay, Open and Closed Grass court events, all graded at the S700 level, with four tournaments at S400, ten at S200 and four at S100. There will be another new tournament, in Newquay in 2022.

Most of the GB Circuit Tournament Directors joined a virtual meeting with ITF Seniors to hear of the latest regulations and ask questions. This is being repeated early in 2022.

The National Tournaments

Sadly, because of the ongoing Covid19 situation, the British Open Seniors Clay Court Championships, scheduled for May 2021 were cancelled.

On a happier note, we were delighted to return to Aorangi Park, Wimbledon for the British Seniors Closed Grass Court Championships in August 2021. This marked a return to competition for many players and everyone was happy to be back after two years. The pinnacle of our events in so many respects, and with some draws over-subscribed, players were reminded that extra qualification points often need to be earned - the ever-growing and enjoyable GB Circuit tournaments offering the perfect opportunity for this pursuit!

As reported at the AGM in 2021, we were unable to return to Tipton Sports Academy in January 2021 for the British Open Seniors Indoor Championships. A new venue was found, in Wrexham Tennis Centre but it became necessary to postpone these Championships. We were made to feel very welcome at the rearranged Championships in September 2021 and, although the entry level was lower than usual, many players enjoyed it and planned to return in February 2022.

Seniors Tennis GB and its player constituency owe a massive debt of gratitude to our National Tournament Director, Sarah Wooding, for her exceptional commitment to safely and comprehensively staging these top level ITF Covid compliant events.

In summary, and with sincere thanks to all our volunteer Councillors and the many captains and supporters on and off court who give of their time to help make events run smoothly, it's been a successful year under continued challenging circumstances. Despite the disappointments of some cancellations and postponements, there has been much positive development. The LTA, specifically through their Head of Competitions, Keith Carder, has been extremely supportive in delivery and reach as well as in managing the fall-out of the pandemic. Together, Seniors Tennis GB and LTA are working to provide the best and most enjoyable competitive opportunities for the enormous pool of 35s+ players of all levels: those *circa* 350,000 individuals who are already LTA members as well as the wider public keen to benefit from such an enjoyable, healthy and time-friendly social sport.