

PRESIDENT'S REPORT of 2019

Tennis was certainly impacted by the weather in 2019. The Mini Tennis League Finals had to be postponed for three weeks in March because of Storm Gareth. The Nottingham Open was almost washed away by heavy downpours in June and in July our Ladies County Cup team had to play in 36 degrees in a humid Ilkley. Fortunately Wimbledon escaped the worst of the summer's weather, the new roof on Number One Court being mostly used to extend play when the light faded, rather than when any rain fell. But if the LTA's aim to have more people playing tennis more often is to be realised – in all weathers - then the provision of more indoor courts will continue to be a major priority for all of us.

Despite the heat, both our Summer County Cup teams came top of their divisions in County Week, a great achievement, which made a major contribution to Nottinghamshire becoming Most Improved County in this year's County Cup Race. Last year we finished 33rd out of 44 counties, this year we were 11th equal. The County Cup includes events from U9 to Over 35s (for the first time this year) and Nottinghamshire's success reflects the renewed enthusiasm, commitment and support across the county, from which our teams and their captains have benefited. I am sure that the county training programme organised by our County Training Co-ordinator, Andy Higham, was an important factor.

Participating in a team is a rewarding experience for any player, but participating in a winning team is even more special.

In Cromer the Men beat Hampshire & the Isle of Wight, Leicestershire, North Wales, Somerset and Dorset. Ben Dunbar had specially flown back from the USA again to join Patrick Foley, Andy Higham, Ben Mactaggart, Phillip Peters, Jamie Praditgnam, Eban Straker-Meads, Marcus Walters and Dominic West. Our congratulations and thanks to all of them and to their captain, Callum Chivers.

In Ilkley the Ladies beat Derbyshire, Durham and Cleveland, Northumberland, Sussex and Buckinghamshire and apparently their new kit sponsored by Brenntag was much admired by the other teams. Millie-Mae Matthews, making her senior county debut, joined Anna Buckley, Laura Cooper, Emily Crowe, Lucy Gill, Nina Luiggi and Amelia RajECKI. Our congratulations and thanks to all of them and of course to their captains, Sarah Usher and Sarah Wright.

There was to be more success for the Ladies in the Winter County Cup in Taunton where they beat Avon, Dorset and Norfolk to come top of their group. Sarah Wright and Amelia RajECKI won all six of their matches without dropping a set and Millie-Mae Matthews was not far behind them, winning all five of her matches and only losing one set.

Meanwhile, at home in Nottingham, having beaten Leicestershire and Somerset, the Men were narrowly deprived of victory in their group in a nail-biting final tie against West of Scotland. The team were joined by 14 year old Phoenix Weir, who won five of his six matches and came second out of the 30 players on the week-end's tournament leader board.

Both our County Cups teams are a fine blend of youth and experience, which is encouraging for the future. It is great to see Amelia, Mille-Mae and Phoenix already making their mark at this level.

Phoenix is currently the British Number Two at U14. He was joined in our U14 Boys County Cup team by the then ten year old, Hugo Dunn, who won his first match 6-0, 6-4 against Lincolnshire in May and later contributed two wins to the U12 win over Northamptonshire in July.

Our County Cup Race had got off to a good start in March when the 18U Girls came first in their group and the 18U Boys came second in theirs. From a very windy Grantham (10U Girls) to a baking hot Caunton (U12 Boys) our Junior teams have travelled far and wide to represent the county.

A particularly successful Junior County team was the U12 Girls. In spite of the heat in Corby (33 degrees), they came top of their Qualifying Event, beating Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Cambridgeshire. At the National Finals in Bolton they came up against the best counties in the country and finished 6th overall, a fine achievement. The team was Naomi Szczur and Mia Wainwright with Sophia Lager and Henna Quraishi, both ten years of age and playing in their first U12 County Cup.

With special thanks to all the parents for their support, we are grateful to all the Junior captains and assistants, Zeferino Antonio, James Cale, Callum Chivers, Jamie Drummond, James Harding, Andy Higham and Jane Stokes and to all their players, who represented Nottinghamshire and contributed to our Most Improved County Award this year.

Our County Teams are sponsored by Brenntag and we are indebted to them and to our other sponsors - Dunlop, Pendragon, John Pye Ltd. and RWB Accountants - for their continued support. We are also grateful to Rick Britton, who works tirelessly to retain our sponsors and to look after them for us.

At the moment, the results from the Seniors Inter-County Cup do not count towards the County Cup Race, which is a shame, as our Seniors have continued to do extremely well. However, this will be changing next year when the Senior Inter-County Cup will be consolidated with all the other County Cup events and this should make us even more successful.

This year the O50 Ladies, captained by Joanne Higham, and the O65 Ladies, captained by our own Rosie Watkins, gained promotion, while the O70 Ladies, captained by Jill Shelvey, finished 2nd in the first division, just missing out on the play-offs by sets. The O65 Men, captained by Nick Lodge, and the O70 Men, captained by Nick Shelvey, were also promoted.

Congratulations and thanks to them and to all the other team captains, Helen Adcott, Russell Blenkinsop, Richard Dickens, Maia Dunn, Aldonna Greenwood, Kevin Oxley and Jason Revill. Sadly Aldonna Greenwood has had to retire after many years captaining County teams, due to a severe injury, and we thank her for her contribution to tennis in the county.

Thanks also to David Carter, County Senior Coordinator Officer.

The West Bridgford Seniors tournament again had a strong entry from across the country and local successes were Elaine Masters and Kathryn Hale, who won the O50 Ladies Doubles, and Nick Lodge, who reached the final of the O65 Men's Singles. Burton Joyce, Nottingham Castle and West Bridgford entered various teams into the National Club Championships and it would be good to see more of our clubs joining them in the future.

At the beginning of the year in January at the British Open Seniors Indoor Championship, Tony Alexander and Peter Whitehead reached the final of the O60 Doubles. Sarah Wright won both the Women's 35 Singles title and, with our own Maia Dunn, the Women's 35 Doubles. Sarah's success continued in May when she captained the successful Over 35 Ladies England team in the 2019 Four Nations Championships in Dublin. At the British Open Clay Court Championships Sarah won the

O35 Ladies Singles and the Doubles, with Milli Shah. Meanwhile, Isabelle Bramhall won the O50 Ladies Singles and the Doubles, with Siobhan Nicholson.

At the British Senior Closed Grass Court Tournament played at Wimbledon in August, Maia Dunn won the O40 Ladies Singles and was subsequently invited to represent Great Britain in Florida. The next generation was also playing at Wimbledon in August, Hugo Dunn reaching the last 16 of the Road to Wimbledon Finals. Considering he is only 11 and was playing older boys, this is a great achievement. Annabel Bird, from Farnsfield Tennis Club, was our other Road to Wimbledon finalist and she too reached the last 16. Both these young players had an unforgettable experience at the All England Club and we congratulate both of them.

The Nature Valley Nottingham Open is an LTA pre-Wimbledon grass court event, but there was less play on the grass than usual, as torrential rain forced many of the matches indoors, which was very disappointing for the spectators, especially after the success of this event in recent years. We had again invited Club Chairs or their representatives to an informal meeting and tea during the Nottingham Open, but this had to be cancelled. Last year we had specifically offered advice on compliance with the LTA's new safeguarding requirements. A year later all our clubs have a Safeguarding Officer in place and Sue Clague, our county Safeguarding Officer, continues to assist clubs to ensure that young people and vulnerable adults are protected in our sport.

In the WTA event, French top seed, Caroline Garcia, came from a set down to take the Singles title, defeating second seed Donna Vekic (a familiar figure on the Nottingham courts). An even more familiar Nottingham figure won the ATP Challenger singles title. I remember a young Dan Evans, from Solihull, competing in and winning the Notts Junior Open (the old Upton) and he was later based at the Nottingham Tennis Centre, when he was coached by Mark Hilton. Evans has certainly had a chequered tennis career and a rocky relationship with the LTA, but the way in which he has rebuilt that career to become the British number one and Davis Cup hero again, after being banned for a year in 2017, is both impressive and heart-warming. The first steps on that long road back were taken at last year's Nottingham Open, where he reached the final.

Dan Evans was the first winner of the re-named Paul Hutchins Trophy. Paul, who died this year, presented our Awards in 2015 and later that year and in the following years was the LTA Tournament Director of the WTA and ATP events at the revived Nottingham Open. These events were a huge success and attracted record-breaking crowds. This success was a direct result of Paul's incredible attention to detail. From the choice of the floral displays around the grounds to monitoring in person the traffic flow out of the car parks, nothing escaped his attention. On court he delivered outstanding tennis of the highest quality and off court a top class sporting event with a great atmosphere for the spectators. He was respected by and very popular with the players and he inspired his team of enthusiastic volunteers with his leadership and professionalism.

Paul often publicly expressed his pride in the success of the event and acknowledged the support of the people of Nottingham. In their turn the people of Nottinghamshire owe him a huge debt for a job well done and for his commitment to tennis in the county. We will miss him.

Linked to the local interest in the Nature Valley Nottingham Open, a number of our clubs held successful Nature Valley Open Days to raise their profiles in the local community and to encourage and welcome potential new members. Collingham Tennis Club, in the spirit of widening participation, linked theirs to mental health and other support groups and also featured a wheelchair tennis

exhibition match. A local wheelchair user, who had not played tennis since school, was inspired to take it up again.

In July, James Shaw reached the second round of the Quad Singles at the British Open Wheelchair Championships in Nottingham and particularly appreciated the vociferous local supporters, if not the unexpected heat. In May James had represented Great Britain at the World Team Cup in Israel and later with his partner Kim, from Korea, won the Doubles title at the French Riviera Open in September, as well as playing tournaments in the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the USA.

Freya Christie started the year in January with a British Tour Singles title in Loughborough and then played in the ITF World Tennis Tour in Korea, India and Israel, winning a Doubles title with Ekaterina Yashina in Khimki in Russia in May. She also partnered Katie Swan in the first round of the Ladies Doubles at Wimbledon.

Luke Bambridge reached four Doubles finals with Jonny O'Mara in India, Brazil, Florida and Portugal. They also got to the second round of the Australian Open, where they were beaten by Jamie Murray and Bruno Soares. Luke also played Mixed Doubles with Asia Muhammad of the USA, reaching the second round of both the French Open and Wimbledon. However, the high point of his year was reaching the Quarter Finals of the Men's Doubles at the US Open with Ben McLachlan. New Zealand born, Ben, represents Japan and the pair enjoyed very vocal courtside support from the Japanese tennis fans in New York.

Amelia Rajecki is currently number one on the British Tour Leaderboard, having won five British Grade 2 Tours this year – Billesley, Corby, Loughborough, Oxford and Ilkley. At the Junior Nationals in Nottingham in September, she reached the final of the 18U Girls Singles, while her County Cup team-mate, Millie Mae-Matthews, reached the final of the 16U Girls Doubles. Phoenix Weir reached the semi-final of the 14U Boys Singles and won the 14U Boys Doubles with Ben Hudson.

Phoenix also did very well at the Notts County Championships at the end of August, winning the 18U Boys Singles, the 18U Boys Doubles with Daniel Wright, and the 14U Boys Doubles with his brother, Indy.

This year's County Championships, sponsored by John Pye Auctions, were a great success with the entries up on recent years, particularly in the female categories. Jessica Spencer won six titles – the Ladies Singles, beating Maia Dunn, the 18U and 16U Girls Singles, the 18U Girls Doubles with Sophie Cassidy-De Falco, the 16U Girls Doubles with Olivia Corfe and the 18U Mixed Doubles with Tom Utton.

In addition to the 18U Boys Doubles, Daniel Wright won the 16U Boys singles, the 16U Boys Doubles with Kade Straker-Meads and the 16U Mixed Doubles with Olivia Corfe.

Hugo Dunn (Most Improved Junior Boy in February's Notts LTA Awards) won the 12U Boys Singles, the 12U Boys Doubles with Jack Stamp and the 12U Mixed Doubles with his sister, Lilia. He was beaten in the 14U Boys Singles final by Connor Green.

Other winners were Naomi Szczur (14U Girls Singles), Henna Qurashi (12U Girls Singles) and Patrick Foley, who beat Andy Higham in a hard-fought Men's Singles Final.

In the Mini Tennis events, which were run by Jill Shelvey, the winners were James Beale, Archie Killen-Smith, Elijah Killen-Smith, Evan Lam, Spike Morgan-Tansley, Benjamin Phillips, Isabella Smillie and Bethan Wright.

Organising 139 players, competing in 304 matches across 30 events, was a daunting task, but, as ever, Andy Bradley, the Referee and our LTA Councillor, had everything under control. We are grateful to him and all his team for a job well done and for delivering a memorable tournament to round off the summer.

Back in the spring, and postponed for three weeks because of Storm Gareth, The Notts LTA Mini Tennis League Finals were held at the Tennis Centre, where the North and South League winners and runners-up came to play each other. 12 teams, involving 40 players took part. Like last year, Grantham won the Red Finals (under 8s) and West Bridgford won both the Orange Finals (under 9s) and the Green Finals (under 10s). The Mini Tennis Leagues are sponsored by RWB Accountants and Richard Bonnelo and his son, Nick, presented the trophies.

Although the parents did find it chilly on the outside courts, at least the rain held off. This year, for our younger players, it was either too hot, too windy or too wet. Novak Djokovic did all right and, as a boy, he had to practice in a swimming pool, but at least it was empty.

I should like to thank Rosie Watkins, County Administrator and County Secretary, and Jill Shelvey and all the members of her Management Committee for giving their time, commitment and dedication to tennis in Nottinghamshire.

Nottinghamshire Lawn Tennis Association has always benefited, not only from the contribution of its Officers and volunteers, but also from the generosity of those, who originally gave it the land and the assets that we manage and preserve today, and subsequently from the generosity of those, who followed their lead and their example.

This year Notts LTA received a legacy of £10,000 from the estate of Margaret (Peggy) Mason, who had been a Vice-President for many years. We intend to put this to very good use and are profoundly grateful to Peggy for remembering the Association in this way.

Finally, whatever the weather, I wish everyone involved with tennis in Nottinghamshire a successful and enjoyable 2020.

Christopher Walker

December 2019