SPECIAL KAY
ED KAY’S PROGRESS IS RECOGNISED AT THE BRITISH OPEN, WHILE CHRIS CHAPMAN HAS A WEEK TO REMEMBER

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The Winter Newsletter 2016
Number 117
Chairman’s Chat

Linda and I have been initiated into the Tournoi des Trois Tripots, which took place in October in three locations in the south-west of France: Bayonne, La Bastide Clairence and Urrugne. These courts are now usually used as Basque trinquet courts, but they were slightly adapted with the addition of a net and some lines on the floor for five days of jeu de paume (real tennis). The courts were formerly used for real tennis but now have white walls and plain cement floors, which made seeing the yellow balls a bit tricky!

Anyway, we had a great time with chums from Newmarket and did reasonably well against many of the other 14 teams. All in all we had a very enjoyable time with much socialising in beautiful locations, very well organised by Simon Berry and Simon Mansfield. It is proposed to be held again in 2018, so keep a look out for details.

Also in October we held the RTC Prizegiving on the court, attended by about 80 people. The function included piped music, some historical pearls of wisdom from former RTC head professional Chris Ronaldson, and an almost endless supply of canapes and drink. Owen Saunders and his team had worked hard to make the court look especially attractive. John Halliday took photos of the winners and other shots; these will shortly be available to view and you will be able to buy prints for a nominal sum.

Congratulations to Ed Kay, of the Royal Tennis Court and the Cambridge University club, for being awarded the Baerlein Cup, which rewards the best performance by an amateur in the country over the previous season. That week he also won a round of the British Open at the Queen’s Club before coming up against world champion Camden Riviere.

That leads me nicely on to congratulate Chris Chapman, our senior professional, who beat both Rob Fahey and Steve Virgona, on his way to his first British Open singles final, against Camden Riviere. As a consequence of having done so well, Chris moves up from No 7 to No 4 in the world rankings (see opposite).

As I write this, the tickets for the forthcoming Carol Service on 21 December have nearly sold out. I look forward to seeing many you at the Chapel Royal and afterwards on the court for mulled wine and mince pies – a tremendous climax to another great year at our club. If you would like to help on the night, please mention it to one of the pros or to Owen Saunders.

In the meantime, best wishes to you and your family for a happy and healthy Christmas and New Year, and a hope that your chases you set are better than one!

Julian Sheraton-Davis

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Annual Carol Service
☛ Prepare your lungs for Wednesday 21 December at the Chapel Royal.

Junior Tournament Weekend
☛ Aged under 25, or know someone who is? Make sure you/they enter the 21-22 January competitions.

IRTPA National League
☛ RTC’s Chris Chapman and Nick Hatchett take on the Faheys of Holyport at RTC on Wednesday 8 February and host Cambridge (featuring Ed Kay) on Friday 17 March. They also travel to Leamington (and Ben Taylor-Matthews) on Friday 17 February.

Chairman’s Event
☛ Next year’s Chairman’s Event will feature a charity quiz on Saturday 29 April, with the proceeds going towards the Junior Development Fund.

COMING UP

RTC
17–18 Dec: Barker Camm Cup D Grade (40-50 hcp)
21 Dec: Christmas Carol Service
5 Jan: Winter Night Pennant starts (55-70 hcp)
7-8 Jan: Junior Tournament Weekend (aged under 25)
21–22 Jan: Barker Camm Cup C Grade (30-40 hcp)
8 Feb: iRTPA National League: RTC v Holyport
25–26 Feb: Barker Camm Cup B Grade (20-30 hcp)
17 Mar: iRTPA National League: RTC v Cambridge

ELSEWHERE
3-8 Jan: U21 & U24 Open Championships (Middlesex U)
6-14 Jan: Australian Open (Melbourne)
6-8 Jan: National Fathers & Sons (Leamington)
13-15 Jan: Chetwood Trophy (Hyde Bridport)
20-22 Jan: Leamington Open Handicap Singles
17 Feb: iRTPA National League: Leamington v RTC
17-19 Feb: British Ladies’ Masters Singles (Oratory)
18-26 Feb: Amateur Championships (Queen’s)
24-25 Feb: Varsity Matches (Lord’s)
25 Feb-6 Mar: US Open (Philadelphia)
As most of you will know already, our senior pro Chris Chapman enjoyed a memorable British Open at Queen’s in November. As if reaching the final (his third Open singles final) were not enough, he also claimed the scalps of the players ranked second and third in the world, his fellow Aussies Rob Fahey and Steve Virgona.

The draw hadn’t been kind to Chris. The world’s top 13 players were all present, meaning some dangerous ‘floaters’, and his first match was against one of those, Ricardo Smith. The size of the challenge was evident when Chris stood 2-5, 0-40 down, on second serve, defending a second gallery chase. Remarkably, he managed to win the opening set from that situation, and he took that momentum on to a three-set win.

That set up a quarter-final against Fahey – winner of 11 British Opens among his 48 grand slam singles titles, and the world champion for 22 years until recently. After they shared the first two sets, the third went to 5-5 – the point at which Fahey has so often raised his game in the past. But it was Chris who stepped up this time, and he took that confidence into the fourth set to take it 6-1 6-3 6-1 win.

Chris’s performances meant a leap up the world rankings from No 7 to No 4, which will mean more helpful seedings as he chases points in his quest to reach the World Championship eliminators for the first time in 2018. In that points race (which is separate from the rankings – see below), he is very handily placed at the halfway stage in one of the four eliminator positions.

Waiting in the final was the new world champion. Camden Riviere’s dominance of the sport is remarkable – he has lost only one tournament match since January 2013, and that was the World Championship challenge against Fahey in 2014. Chris showed no signs of nerves, however, and tried everything – but Riviere reaches every ball, makes almost no errors, volleys impeccably and maintains total control of the ball. Another superb display took him to a 6-1 6-3 6-1 win.

Cambridge-based RTC member Ed Kay beat Tom Durack before acquitting himself well in a 4-6 0-6 2-6 second round defeat by Riviere – a match between two of the game’s best movers. After that match that Ed was presented with the Baerlein Trophy (see front cover), which is awarded for the best performance by an amateur over the previous 12 months. He has reduced his handicap to 0.4 and looks capable of pushing top-ten players before long.

Another RTC player, Peter Wright, played exceptionally in taking a set off James Stout, the world rackets champion and an immensely talented but mercurial real tennis player.

In the doubles, Bryn Sayers and Ricardo Smith beat defending champions Chapman and Virgona in the semis before losing a high-class four-set final to the world champions, Riviere and Tim Chisholm.
Barker adds Brodie bite

RTC trekked to Hatfield in the Brodie Cup and prevailed thanks to the next generation

For the second year running, the RTC Brodie Cup team made their way to Hatfield House for their opening fixture, and again they came away with a 3-2 victory. This year they had the added fun of the Christmas Frost Fair – fun as in “massive traffic jam”. There was also the new complication of all Brodie Cup matches now being played with the home side giving a handicap of owe ½ 15, in an attempt to reduce the lopsided home versus away win statistics.

The 45+ doubles started the day, with the unfamiliar pairing of Doug Sheperdigian and John Mather, playing the unfamiliar game of doubles, on an unfamiliar court. Despite all that, Sheperdigian’s consistency and Mather’s knack of repeatedly finding the grille kept the match tight. The first set went to the wire, with Hatfield’s Chris Handley and Jim Foxall just edging it 6-5. The second set was competitive but not quite as close, with Handley’s all-round excellence, and Foxall’s rackets-bred volleying coming to the fore, and Hatfield took it 6-4.

On paper, and in Peter Mather’s head, the 30+ singles against Stephen Brewerton looked like the home player was the favourite. As it turned out, Brewerton never stood a chance. Mather repeatedly tracked down his best shots and punished everything else, always finding a balance between length, power and precision for a comfortable 6-2 6-3 victory.

Next up, in the 40+ singles, was Martin Daly, whose loss in last year’s Brodie Cup final was the only blemish on the otherwise perfect singles record of RTC. His opponent, Tim Harper, represented Daly’s kryptonite: a previously low (21) handicapper now cruising in the less glamorous handicap range. As with the 45+ doubles, the first set was close, with Daly nicking it 6-5. Harper faded in the second set, and Daly took it 6-2 to edge RTC in front.

Brodie Cup debutant Ivan Barker (son of 10-time club champion Simon) completed the singles matches against Nick Pickard. Again the first set was tight, but Pickard, with his wrists-of-steel, don’t-try-this-at-home-kids backhand volley in front of his face style, found his form at the crucial moment to prevail 6-5. Barker, to his credit, did not let his head drop, and instead raised his game, played several shots of which dad would be proud – we know this for a fact because dad was in the dedans, beaming from ear to ear – and took the next two sets 6-4 6-2 to seal the win for RTC.

As luck would have it, the 35+ doubles rubber was dead, because Paul Wright had mistakenly selected Clown Mode™ and wasn’t able to help a bemused George Sleightholme defeat Louise Mercier and Andy Goldsmith.

RTC will probably have played their next match by the time you read this, on 11 December – this time at home (against Holyport), and thus against the owe ½ 15 handicap. That same day, Phil Dunn’s Pol Roger Trophy team will be at Queen’s with high hopes of avenging last season’s semi-final defeat there. Queen’s are now without their star man Conor Medlow, who has gone to Chicago as a rackets professional.

Chase off!

Congratulations to former club champion Charlie Crossley, who married Jennifer Chisholm on 23 September in Wilmington, North Carolina. Charlie met Jen, who is the sister of Tim Chisholm, in October 2003 when he was working with Tim at the Racquet and Tennis Club in New York. The couple got engaged at the Royal Tennis Court on Boxing Day last year (see above).

T&RA Category G Championships: Bronstein does it again

The National Category G tournament, at Leamington Spa in September, was open to T&RA members with handicaps of over 60 and was split into two categories: 60+ (played off level) and 65+ (played off handicap).

Ray Longbottom, from the home court, took the 60+ title after a long battle with Richard Williams from Hatfield. Longbottom took the first set 6-5 and then trailed 0-4 in the second set but played steady, accurate tennis to make a terrific comeback to win 6-4. In the 65+ competition, RTC’s Martin Bronstein won his second Category G title, coming back from a 2-5 deficit to win 6-5 against Laurence Sampson of Leamington. Sampson, 22, is a theology student, and Bronstein quipped that to win the title he had to beat Man and God.

In 2014 Bronstein, then aged 79, beat 21-year-old Ben Compton to win his first title. Compton won the title in 2015 but did not compete this year.
There was some success for RTC members at the British Ladies’ Handicap Tournament at the Oratory and Hardwick in November – although each of our three finalists just fell at the final hurdle in their respective competitions.

In the Division 2 singles Final, RTC’s Katy Doy (handicap 85) was up against Hannah Lucey (70), who had beaten her in the group stages. With both players having their handicaps capped at 65, meaning a level game, Katy was very much the underdog. Still, she won two 40-all games to move 5-3 ahead, before Hannah pulled back to take it 6-5.

Charlotte Barker reached the final of the Division 2 doubles, in tandem with Amanda Murphy. The French pair of Jeannette Guardia and Audrey Perie were just too strong, though, pulling away to win 6-3 – before treating the dedans to all the verses of La Marseillaise.

In the Division 1 doubles final, our representative was Linda Sheraton-Davis, who paired up with Seacourt’s Georgie Willis against Liz Leach and Lorrayne Gracie. In a fast-paced match with excellent volleying from all, Linda gallantly guarded the galleries and Georgie covered the rest of the court with endless energy, but their opponents kept up the pressure and claimed the title 6-2.

Fifteen love for Watson

David Watson is into his 15th straight Harris Watson Trophy doubles final

You can count on certain things happening at this time of year: the John Lewis Christmas advert will become a media obsession, the trains around London will become even less reliable than normal – and David Watson will reach the final of the Harris Watson Trophy, aka the club doubles championship.

Since 2003 David has featured in every final, winning nine of those in the ten years up to 2012 – but in the past four seasons he and elder son James have had to settle for the runners-up prize. With 2014-15 and 2015-16 champions Ed Kay and Peter Wright absent, the draw suggested that the Watsons and the pairing of Phil Dunn and James Soh would progress, and that was how it turned out. David and James had no trouble at all with Simon Edmond and David Blizzard in the first semi-final, advancing 6-0 6-2.

On paper the second semi-final looked a little more competitive, with Phil and James up against the experienced pairing of Simon Barker and Mark McMurrugh, who had already played well in defeating Stephen Goss and Fred Satow in the previous round. Indeed, thanks to the busy hustle of Simon and the sharp volleying of Mark, they had slightly the better of the opening exchanges as Phil and James struggled to find their rhythm.

A 3-2 lead didn’t quite become 4-2, though, and after that the seeded pair began to assert their authority, as Simon’s iffgy back began to feel the strain of two matches either side of an hour’s break. Phil and James closed out the first set 6-3 and though many of the games in the second set were close, Phil and James took it 6-1 to set up an intriguingly tight final, which is likely to be played in May 2017. Keep an eye out for announcements regarding the date.

Why Join the T&RA?

Membership of the UK governing body is voluntary – but the RTC board recommends it

The activities of the T&RA cover:

- Maintaining the laws and the history of the game
- Funding and managing the handicap system
- Organising national competitions and championships at all age levels
- Liaising with the IRTPA with regards to standards and tournaments internationally
- Providing communication on the sport, including the website and the in-depth annual report
- Advising on, and sometimes helping to finance, the construction, restoration and maintenance of courts, in the way of loans and grants
- Assisting clubs and schools, including the provision of health and safety advice
- Organising and assisting with funding for the training of professionals in the UK
- Helping to arrange sponsorship for competitions
- Working closely with the professionals’ associations and the ladies’ association
- Recruiting young people into the game by supporting coaching, tournaments and other events

Full members of the T&RA can enter the national tournaments sponsored by the T&RA; receive the fixture list, newsletters and annual report; for younger members, potentially become part of funded schemes and specialist coaching.
National League

The RTC duo of Chris Chapman and Nick Hatchett have settled back into the National League groove nicely.

They opened up at home against Leamington, and Nick started well against young Robert Shenkman, winning the first set 6-2. The student is never one to give up, however, and he chased enough lost causes to draw more and more errors from the slightly rusty Hatchett racket. The second set went Leamington’s way 6-4 and the third followed 6-0.

The showpiece of the evening was the match-up between Chris and former RTC pro Ben Taylor-Matthews. Aided by a consistent railroad serve, Chris soon took the match by the scruff of the neck and the first set was over in a flash, 6-1 to RTC. His balance of speed and strength, power and control caused big problems for Ben, whose own rusty Hatchett racket. The second set went the same way as the first, over in a flash of cut shots, forces and winning openings. A 6-1 6-0 victory, it was an exemplary performance.

In the next match, their away opener at Holyport, Chris beat Ricardo Smith (subbing for Rob Fahey) but Nick couldn’t quite get the better of Claire Fahey in the second string match. At Petworth Chris won again, and Nick was playing well to move a set up against the dangerous Louis Gordon before an untimely injury forced him to concede defeat.

Back at home against Manchester, Nick notched up his first win, though it was a dour struggle against the hard-hitting Zak Eadle. Chris thrashed Darren Long to maintain his perfect record and leave RTC in second place in the table. They will resume in February at home, with the visit of the Faheys from Holyport.

Elsewhere, it’s early days in most divisions. Josh Smith and Phil Dunn have lost a couple of very tight matches in Division 2, while the Division 3 trio of David Watson, James Sohl and Simon Barker remain well in contention. Division 4 has strangely featured four away wins in five matches and RTC are part of that trend, having lost at home before winning up at Cambridge.

Division 5 looks very promising, with Fred Satow’s squad opening up a healthy gap at the top after defeating Canford. Simon Fox fought out three three-set wins before notching up a 6-0 6-0 victory in that fourth match.

RTC are in the thick of the ten-team Division 6 fight, while our Division 7 team have played just two matches, three-set wins before notching up a 6-0 6-0 victory in that fourth match.

The autumn night pennant was claimed by the trio of Saverio Campione, Ian Scoffield and John Mather (near right) narrowly claimed the Autumn Night Pennant for handicaps 40-55, edging out John Dagnall, Ben Simonds-Goodyng and Jack Marriott on games won after each team won three sets in the final.

Over-50 Amateur Singles

David Watson narrowly failed to add to his tally of five National Over-50s titles at Lord’s. After beating fellow RTC player Simon Barker in the semi-finals, he had the small matter of James Male, the former world rackets champion. Although David kept it close, the match ended in a 4-6 4-6 defeat.

Autumn Night Pennant

The trio of Saverio Campione, Ian Scoffield and John Mather (near right) narrowly claimed the Autumn Night Pennant for handicaps 40-55, edging out John Dagnall, Ben Simonds-Goodyng and Jack Marriott on games won after each team won three sets in the final.

Staying power

Congratulations to Matthew Alden of Oxford, now the official holder of the Guinness world record for the most consecutive opponents in real tennis. Starting at 7am on a Saturday and ending at 3:35am the following day, he faced 28 opponents, playing best of three sets in each match. In doing so he raised money for two charities – Keen Oxford and Many Hopes.
Melvyn Pignon (1930-2016)

Melvyn Mary Hickey was born in Stourbridge in 1930, the younger of two children. Her older brother, Raymond, died in 1995, but he was the reason she had such a competitive spirit. She always needed to climb every tree higher than he did.

She excelled in all sports and first played hockey at Kidderminster High School for girls. After training as a PE teacher, she began her teaching career at Joseph Leckie comprehensive in Walsall. She became a fixture in the Midlands team and won the first of her 62 England caps against Ireland in 1957, also representing England on tours to South Africa in 1954, Australia in 1956, the Netherlands in 1959 and the USA in 1963.

She moved south in the late 1950s, living on a houseboat on Taggs Island, opposite Hampton Court, where former hockey team-mates recall numerous late-night parties. Taking up posts at local schools, she frequently honed her shooting skills against the first XI goalkeepers.

After a romantic and enduring love affair with Laurie Pignon, they married in 1968. Although he had had an unhappy first marriage, she agreed to be named in his divorce. The next season the English committee did not select her for the team – a massively controversial decision! Her surviving stepdaughters describe her as a “wonderful, wonderful friend”.

Life with Laurie was never dull. Melvyn and her adored “Pignon” enjoyed an idyllic existence in a cottage in Sunbury. She was a wonderful cook and hostess and also made her own curtains and bedspreads. She was widely acknowledged as a witty and brilliant writer for Hockey Field magazine and the All England Women’s Hockey Association. In 1962 she wrote a book called Hockey for Women.

Melvyn took up real tennis when she won a racket at Queen’s after a competition between sports correspondents. She was easily the best of those first-time players. She finally captured a title in 1997, with an 8-7 victory in the British Handicap Doubles. She became a popular and enthusiastic supporter and gave back to our sport her time and energy by doing a wonderful job on the committee of the Ladies Real Tennis Association for 13 years. When Melvyn stood down in 2004 she was delighted to be made an honorary life member.

At the Royal Tennis Court she was a popular opponent, always competitive but charming, gracious and a friend to everybody she knew. There was never a bad word to be said about anyone. It was tragic that she was diagnosed with dementia in 2010 but, although a terrible blow to someone with such a lively mind, she fought it tooth and nail. On 4 September Melvyn died of a chest infection, aged 86. She was a great lady. — Lesley Ronaldson

Keith Smith (1944-2016)

When I joined the regular Sunday morning doubles quartet some 15 years ago, Keith was already a long-established member of that group. He would leave his home in Slough at a non-convivial hour (we often started at 7am) and played regularly in the group up to about six years ago. Invariably the life and soul of our Sunday sessions, he was known by many members as “Smudge” thanks to his surname.

Some 10 years ago, we played for a couple of Sundays at Holyport, where he was also a member, while our court was being repainted. After play on the second occasion there, he emerged from the kitchenette bearing bacon rolls – which were more than welcome to us hungry players. I suggested that we make a habit of this, and sure enough we did. This gastronomical exercise has continued, players taking it in turns to provide a late breakfast at the end of our sessions.

By the time Keith was diagnosed as having prostatic cancer it had metastased and could no longer be eliminated. He bore his disease with fortitude. Keith was a talented tennis player and was immensely likeable. He will be greatly missed and our condolences go out to his wife and family.

— David Seelig

Russell Denoon Duncan (1926-2016)

An RTC member for more than 35 years, Russell Denoon Duncan introduced many new players to the sport while himself continuing to play well into his eighties. Russell was born in Johannesburg and qualified as a solicitor. In his own typically modest way he did a great deal to help his fellow man there, including doing much good work behind the scenes with Helen Suzman, the campaigning MP and human rights activist.

He returned to the UK in 1960 and rose to be senior partner of a prominent London law firm. In 1995 he received an Officers Cross of the Order of Merit from the Polish government, in recognition of his work as chair of the British Polish Legal Association. He maintained his razor-sharp intellect, huge zest for life and mischievous sense of humour to the very end, passing away peacefully at home in Thames Ditton.

David Seelig adds... It should be added that those who played with or against Russell recall how friendly and convivial he was. Several members described him as being one of the nicest people they had ever met. I would heartily concur in that description of him.
The season of giving
This year’s Prizegiving was in a familiar setting

The club’s annual prize presentation had a new look and a new location this year, with the traditional dinner format replaced by a more relaxed gathering on the court, with Pol Roger and canapes. Among the 90-odd attendees was guest of honour Chris Ronaldson, who reflected on his 29 years as RTC’s head professional. Master of ceremonies Owen Saunders piloted the proceedings commendably.

RESULTS

Seal Salver

Barker Camm Cup
(Club championship singles)
F Grade, semi-finals: Stephen Barbour beat Alex Barker 6-0 4-6 6-3; Alex Fell beat Ron Slade 6-2 6-1. Final: Fell beat Barbour 6-2 6-0.
E Grade, semi-finals: Ian Scoffield beat Linda Sheraton-Davis 6-0 5-6 6-5; Ben Simonds-Gooding v Ivan Barker still to be played.

Harris Watson Trophy
(Club championship doubles)
Quarter-finals: Simon Edmond & David Blizzard beat Geoffrey Russell & Martin Daly 6-2 4-6 6-3; Simon Barker & Mark McMurrugh beat Stephen Goss & Fred Satow 6-1 6-4. Semi-finals: David & James Watson beat Edmond & Blizzard 6-0 6-2; Phil Dunn & James Sohl beat Barker & McMurrugh 6-3 6-1.

Brodie Cup
Second round: Hatfield House lost to RTC 2-3. (Hatfield names first): Chris Handley & Jim Foxall bt Doug Sheperdigian & John Mather 6-5 6-4; Stephen Brewerton lost to Peter Mather 2-6 3-6; Tim Harper lost to Martin Daly 5-6 2-6; Nick Pickard lost to Ivan Barker 6-5 4-6 2-6; Louise Mercier & Andy Goldsmith bt Paul Wright & George Sleighholme 6-5 4-6 6-4.

British Open (Queen’s)
Quarter-finals: Steve Virgona beat Kieran Booth 6-2 6-2 6-3; Chris Chapman beat Rob Fahey 6-3 2-6 6-5 6-4; Bryn Sayers beat Ben Taylor-Matthews 6-5 6-5 3-6 6-5; Camden Riviere beat Tim Chisholm 6-4 4-6 5-6 0-4 2-0 rtd.
Semi-finals: Chapman beat Virgona 6-1 6-2 2-0 rtd; Riviere beat Sayers 6-0 6-2 6-1. Final: Riviere beat Chapman 6-1 6-3 6-1.

Doubles, Semi-finals: Sayers & Ricardo Smith beat Chapman & Virgona 6-2 3-6 6-5 6-1; Chisholm & Riviere beat John Lumley & Taylor-Matthews 6-2 6-0 6-1.
Final: Chisholm & Riviere beat Sayers & Smith 5-6 6-2 6-4 6-4.

RTC Top Ten
Singles handicaps
December 2016
1 Ed Kay 0.4
2 Peter Wright 4.7
3 Nick Hatchett 8.8
4 Charlie Crossley 9.5
5 David Harms 13.2
6 Phil Dunn 14.8
7 James Watson 15.5
8 David Watson 15.8
9 Tom Freeman 16.4
10 James Sohl 17.1

The Royal Tennis Court Newsletter
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Editor: Simon Edmond
newsletter@royaltenniscourt.com