

CHAIRS REPORT FOR 2016 AGM – LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT TENNIS GROUP

This year there will be no significant rule changes or special items for consideration at the AGM however, it was thought that a report to Clubs informing them of the Committee's work and ongoing topics of discussion would be helpful. Without cutting across fellow Committee members this report hopes to give some useful background in preparation for our AGM.

It is hoped that this report isn't a dry and dusty effort but one that gives Clubs a good understanding of where the Group is and gives useful information to aid discussion. There are some links in this document to original paperwork if needed

Thank you to all Clubs who have supported the Group in 2016 and also to our principal sponsor [Terrys Timber](#). Without such support it would not be possible to continue as a Group and hold what will be our 69th AGM.

Your Committee

Currently your Committee has 12 members and meets on average 5 or 6 times per year. As the Group covers quite a wide geographical area we alternate meetings between a north and south venue to ensure that the burden of travel is equally shared. Blundellsands and Bohemians generously offer their facilities for the meetings and I am most grateful for their help.

In addition to running the League we try to consider more long term projects which will secure the future of Group. Some of these projects are mentioned in this report and will require your input at the meeting

Your Committee members are all volunteers and devote their time free of charge to ensure that the long tradition of competitive recreational tennis continues in Liverpool and its surrounding districts. I say it every year that I am extremely fortunate to have the support of a hardworking and dedicated Committee.

Committee nominations

All Committee members have indicated that they are prepared to carry on for the 2017 season. We do however need new nominations in order that there is some succession to key roles in the future. For the first year new members will generally take stock and there is little pressure to take on a role unless they wish to do so. As many of you will have noticed, our Ladies section is under represented on the Committee and it would be beneficial if we could attract more Lady members.

We would like Clubs views on other ways in which they could support the Committee. It may be that someone did not want to serve full time on the Committee but might be able to help work on specific projects or events. Please give this some thought as small effort from a few extra people might allow us to bring many ideas to fruition.

Rule Changes

There is only one rule change proposed for this year and that is a minor amendment to Rule 1i where the deadline for entering teams into the league (and confirming teams) could now be extended to the 31st of January rather than 31st December. The rationale of this rule change would be to give Clubs more time to consider its team options. If this proposal is accepted then we would move the Fixtures meeting to the end of February. The one proviso here is that Clubs *must* be able to confirm all Handbook data by the Fixtures meeting.

There have been some ideas for rule changes put forward by Clubs during the year and the Committee considers these carefully. One proposal was not to provide a free week to support the Parks Tournament. The Committee view is that we continue to support the Parks for another season and then review the free week for 2018.

Quite often Clubs will float ideas for rearranging the divisions. The Committee is always interested in thoughts which would increase tennis participation across the Group but would need some strong evidence to make such changes which could also alienate existing participants.

Rule Clarifications

From time to time the Committee gives some guidance on Rules. In this case we refer to rules 3a and 5e where the condition of the courts and factors that might impede progress of the match are dealt with. Please be aware that these rules deal with the condition of the courts and whether they are able to provide an acceptable game of tennis. *They do not determine whether the courts are safe to play.* It is the responsibility of each Club to ensure that their courts are safe to play and that the various procedures laid down by their Insurance company are followed.

Online recording of results

One of our longer term projects is to see if the online recording of results would benefit the Group. It is probably the question that I get asked most when on my travels around Clubs.

A few years ago we evaluated the possibility of recording results online and possibly replacing the current scorecard system. I led the research and spent about 20 hours looking at various systems and speaking to a number of other leagues who had converted to online recording and also those who had considered the idea but continued to use cards. At that time Clubs rejected the opportunity to move to an online system and since then the Committee has kept a watching brief on how these systems are improving.

There were many problems with the original proposal which had difficulty in accommodating our scoring system and was not able to automatically monitor pairs playing out of order. Further reported issues included delays in dual confirmation of results, bureaucratic admin and difficulty in correcting results once they had been entered. There was also the general concern about committing ourselves to a third party system which would then have some financial control over the Group through recurring (and possibly increasing) licence fees. Some Committee members also felt wary of committing to any system which made (or might be able to make) British Tennis Membership a condition of playing in the league. Obviously should the free BTM change to a paid

subscription this would then be difficult to oppose if the whole league structure relied upon such membership.

Since the original research, new systems have become available and it is probably worth reevaluating the research. There is also the possibility of commissioning a bespoke system similar to the Warrington and District League.

It is fair to say that views on the Committee are mixed on this subject and I think that any online system would have to have the existing card system running in parallel for the first year. After all, there would be no prizes for a league which failed to deliver league results due to an unforeseeable online failure.

It is also worth stating that our own analysis of results from the scorecards has improved significantly over the last couple of years with Jamie's "Heat Map" being highly effective in identifying playing order infringements. It would be almost certain that any online system would have to give us the same level of analysis.

I would be grateful if Clubs could come to a meeting with a current view on the online recording of results. The research is time consuming and I think the Committee would want a clear view from *Club's own research on the subject* as to whether it is worth the effort, particularly since our last proposal for the LTA League Planner system was heavily rejected by Clubs.

Over the last few years the Group has carefully rebuilt its financial position and is now able to fund all options for the online recording of results.

Opting-In and Wimbledon Tickets

When the system was first introduced by the LTA there was clearly some considerable dissatisfaction from Clubs and I agreed to write to the LTA in London. For those new to the discussion, the correspondence can be reviewed [on our website](#).

From what we can gather the LTA has reacted positively and the system has now improved considerably. Please let us have your views at the meeting. One issue which the LTA did not agree with was that the revised Opt-in procedure gave a geographical advantage to Clubs nearer Wimbledon. The LTA does not accept that BTM members Opting-in in Liverpool and farther north are doing so to principally benefit their Club's allocation whilst those nearer Wimbledon are Opting-in with the additional personal incentive of visiting the Championships.

In tandem with this discussion was the persistent rumour that the LTA was considering charging for the free BTM membership which qualified for the Wimbledon ballot. Various amounts were mentioned from £20 to £25 pounds per person per annum. This seemed unfair as Clubs already paid their LTA affiliation fees and now their members would now be asked to pay again to be in the ballot. The matter came to a head when we were made aware of the market research behind this proposal and a recommendation to levy the charge.

I think that your Committee was unanimous on this point and vigorously opposed this proposal through any lines of communication we had directly with the LTA and via our County Association.

Clearly others had the same view and earlier in the year we received notification from the LTA that they had revaluated the proposal and would not proceed with the charge,

I think this is good news for all parties. Many Clubs see the only benefits of the LTA being the Insurance and the Wimbledon ballot. If the benefit of the ballot was to go then the LTA would be left merely as provider of insurance, which for a governing body like the LTA would be a rather unsatisfactory position. Clubs can now go forward with the knowledge that the free BTM membership still qualifies their members for the Wimbledon ballot.

Behaviour

Inevitably in any report there is always one negative aspect. Here it is the growing concern about bad behaviour during matches. Your Committee has asked me to be clear, crystal clear in this report so that there can be no misunderstandings on this point. Here is my best effort at being crystal clear.

The toxic consequences of bad behaviour cannot be overstated and the Committee is committed to eradicate this from the Group by whatever means is necessary. There are many obvious reasons why this is unacceptable – and some less obvious that might need explaining. There are currently many initiatives in Clubs to gain new members and secure their future. These involve a lot of time and effort which can be undone in a moment if a visiting team arrives and uses foul language and is generally abusive to all in earshot. For instance, is unlikely that a family enjoying one of our trial memberships would come back if it experienced such abuse.

Furthermore, many Clubs rely on their relationship with neighbours residents and Local Authorities for their existence and bad behaviour could cause them to lose licences or the support they need to survive. So if one individual, team or Club is affecting the survival of many other Clubs then you will see why it is necessary to action.

The Committee has currently compiled a number of incidents of bad behaviour which Committee members have personally reported. These can be discussed at any time and it is likely that that the Match Regulations sub Committee will automatically refer these to the Group Committee with the members of that meeting taking any necessary action. It is worth remembering that any decision taken by the Group Committee is final.

It is not for me to pre-empt a decision from the Committee however current rules allow for teams to be expelled from the League. In particularly difficult cases it is also possible that the Committee could levy a large fine or even expel the Club from the Group. Prior to any such sanction it is likely that a Committee member would personally observe a fixture and that a warning letter would be sent to the Club. Once the warning letter arrives the Club then needs to take *immediate action* to resolve the situation or a sanction will follow.

Annual Dinner and Presentation of Prizes

Once again we have Pauline to thank for an exceptional evening. The amount of effort Pauline puts into this evening is considerable and it is appreciated that Clubs make the effort to support the event. There are some issues arising where Clubs do all the hard work winning on Court and then do not attend the dinner to collect their Trophy.

It's difficult to see why that happens but it is suggested that all Clubs put the date of the Dinner in their diaries, particularly if they think they are likely to win something. For the 2017 season all Clubs will be expected to send two representatives to the Dinner if they have won a Trophy. Pauline will bill the Club in question even if no one attends, but obviously we do not expect that to happen.

Regional Tennis Development

There are a number of topics which can be loosely grouped under this heading for ease of discussion. Many of you will remember that the LTA organised an evening in November 2015 for Clubs and other involved parties to brainstorm the future of tennis in the region. From that meeting, an extremely detailed document was produced outlining what needed to be done. The document can be found by [clicking here](#).

Following that meeting there was some optimism since Sheffield had recently received £850,000 worth of funding and it was thought that the LTA might do something similar in Liverpool. After all, why hold a meeting to identify problems if you do not intend to provide a solution.

Since then there has been little response from the hierarchy of the LTA in London as to what strategy they have in place for our region. Despite this vacuum, local representatives of the LTA and every other interested tennis party have got involved to kick start programs that will increase tennis participation. From this effort, an organisation called the Liverpool and District Tennis Steering Group (LDTSG) has been formed and contains many familiar volunteer faces that are currently involved in our own Group. It has spent some time securing pockets of funding and Tony McKee, the Chair of the LDTSG will give an overview of progress at our AGM.

There still remains the pressing question of what overall strategy and funding the LTA is prepared to offer. I am aware that some members of our Group Committee are getting concerned about the lack of any LTA plan and the perceived lack of support for Clubs. I share these concerns and have asked the LTA to quickly clarify what their intentions are for the region and what support can be offered to our 25 Group Clubs.

The 70th Anniversary of the Liverpool and District Tennis Group

As some of you will already know, 2017 will be the 70th Anniversary of the formation of our Group. We have informally discussed a number of ways in which we might mark the occasion but need input from Clubs to proceed. What do we think would be appropriate? It would be hoped that we could use the occasion to promote the Group and its member Clubs to the outside world and encourage tennis participation.

Finally

It is hoped that you can circulate this report and agenda so that your representative can come to the meeting with an official Club view on the items due for discussion. The AGM is your annual opportunity to give feedback and ideas that might improve the Group. We look forward to seeing you and hearing your views.