

# Newsletter

Oxford University Tennis Club



Spring 2013



*Women's Varsity Match Winners from left to right: Flora Olcott, Audrey Davies, Maggie Henderson-Tew and Emily Scaysbrook*

## THE VARSITY MATCH, 2013

*By Maggie Henderson-Tew, with Men's Match Report by Johnny Beale. Photos by Freddy Adam*

### The Result:

We hope you have already heard that the Oxford Real Tennis Men's and Women's teams won their respective Varsity matches at Lord's over 22/23 February. To our delight, it is a repeat of last year's success. Here is a bit more detail...

### Summary:

This year, the Blues Women (Maggie Henderson-Tew, Emily Scaysbrook, Audrey Davies and Flora Olcott) won their match 5-1, as they did in 2012 and 2011, and the Blues Men (Miles Jackson, Johnny Beale, Alex Portz and Euan Campbell) came storming back from going 3-0 down to win 4-3 after the most thrilling possible deciding doubles. It is the first time since the match has been held at Lord's that a deciding doubles has been played. After trawling through

archives (well, after asking everyone on hand during the match), it seems that it may be unprecedented that either side has ever recovered from a 3-0 deficit to win the match. A tremendous effort!

### **The Women's Match:**

The Oxford players were stronger on paper this year than each of their opposite numbers on the Cambridge team, which had unfortunately been hit by injury. Emma Samir-Aly, Emily Brady (C), Karen Pearce and Imogen Whittam all played considerably better than their respective handicaps and with the highest standards of sportsmanship. They were tough and generous opponents.

The story of the Oxford women's team this year has been one of continuous improvement for Audrey Davies, Emily Scaysbrook and Flora Olcott. They have improved, in aggregate, over 40 handicap points since October, with Flora progressing strongly from a standing start. All have had strong match records leading up to Varsity, and this showed. They won their rubbers with the loss of only two sets between them. At one point in the match, there was a run of 25 games of which 24 went Oxford's way.

Flora was first on in the singles and, after a nervous start that saw her lose the first set 3-6, she recovered to win the next two sets in tremendous style, powering through them both without losing a game. Audrey secured the second rubber for the Oxford team, beating a much higher handicapped opponent in two sets, with the loss of only one game. Perhaps the most memorable shot of this year's Varsity, from the Oxford women's point of view, was a remarkable low volley of Audrey's. She sprinted across court at the hazard end to return, at full stretch, a heavily-struck main wall boast that was heading for the floor under the winning gallery. The ball arched over the lowest part of the net to land better than a yard.

With the momentum of the match now firmly with Oxford, Emily then took to the court. For those who have never seen Emily play, it is fair to describe her style as 'forceful'. She typically plays with a 'no prisoners' style and this was a characteristically high-octane performance. Although her opponent, the Cambridge captain, returned many balls as hard as they were struck at her, Emily powered-out the final set, winning 6-5, 5-6, 6-2. The final women's singles

match saw returning captain Maggie and her opponent repeating their 2012 encounter. In a closely-fought and fast-paced match, Maggie was edged out in a couple of crucial games, losing 3-6, 5-6. At the close of the first day's play, the Oxford women were 3-1 ahead, needing just one more win to retain the Varsity trophy.

Day Two. The doubles started with that win from the well-established second pair of Emily and Audrey, but they made the dedans sweat for it. Due to play in the Mixed Lacrosse Varsity match in Cambridge just after noon, Audrey was keen for a quick win. With a 6-2, 5-2 lead, they seemed to be cruising to a comfortable and fairly speedy win. However, a spirited comeback from their opponents brought the score to 5-5. Audrey's repeated glances at the clock showed how anxious the Oxford pair had become. After multiple advantages to either side in turn, Emily hammered a cross-court shot low on the tambour to win the set, the rubber and the Varsity Match for Oxford.

Audrey rushed off and managed to get the last possible train from King's Cross and returned in time for the dinner! Although the win was secure, Flora and Maggie played their doubles match with intensity, coming back from a 5-2 first set deficit to win 6-5, 6-1. Maggie, with a score to settle after the singles, had the satisfaction of hitting the final shot of the women's match, for the third year running.

The women's team send a huge 'thank you' to all their supporters, particularly to the men's team, who offered vocal and energetic dedans encouragement for the entirety of every rubber played.

### **The Men's Match:**

I confess, now that I come to pen a record of what happened in the men's matches, I find it quite difficult. Among the wealth of emotions of the weekend (and a healthy dose - is there any other kind? - of Pol Roger) only fleeting memories remain.

I imagine there was a great deal of uncertainty before the match for both teams. The word that best described the Cambridge team this year was 'depth'. Their entire first and second teams had handicaps below 30, with their first team below 22. The Oxford first team, in comparison, sported a handicap range of 30 points. However, Miles Jackson at number one



*Men's Varsity Match Winners from left to right: Johnny Beale, Euan Campbell, Miles Jackson and Alex Portz.*

must have presented a pretty daunting prospect with a handicap of 11. Alex Portz and I, even if I do so say so myself, have the potential of raising our games on big occasions. Campbell's name would have been new to Cambridge and thus given their team some uncertainty. Before the match, I believed that the fixture might well be decided by the opening doubles matches. Euan and I had worked hard at our doubles strategy in the preceding weeks, but in the end we went down 3-zip (2-6, 4-6, 5-6).

Euan did everything I could have asked of him, and the fault of the defeat was mine. Credit must go to the Cambridge pair of Alex Evans and Freddie Kalfayen, who played a very tight game and didn't give away much.

Miles and Portz's game was a different affair. Portz has not had the time on court that the rest of us have enjoyed, but, such is his tremendous talent, that his skill with bat and ball grew as the game progressed. I hoped that the longer the game went on, the more chance our boys would have of overcoming the experienced pair of Jules Camp and James Watson.

However, we went down two sets quite quickly before the fight back began, and at two sets all I thought we could take the match. And like so many final sets, the results were decided by a quick loss of the opening games and the final score ran 3-6, 5-6, 6-2, 6-4, 4-6 to Cambridge.

So there we were, 2-0 down at the end of the first day with four singles matches still to play. How did the matches stack up? At 4th string, Euan had a Herculean task against Freddie, with a 15 point handicap difference to overcome. The 3rd string contest of Portz and Jules was less one-sided. Portz can certainly play better than his 27 tag, but Jules is a steady 20, and if Portz had lost, the rubber would have been Cambridge's. My game at 2nd string was set to be an even match against Alex Evans. The 1st string game of Miles and James was our only handicap advantage. Miles' handicap is still falling like a stone, and Watson was not playing on the top of his considerable form. I don't think I gave a particularly inspiring or inspired pep talk the night before; everyone knew what they had to do. I do remember saying 'bugger' a lot though...

So how did it go down? Euan played better than I have ever seen him play before, but Freddie played a solid game and won 3-6, 1-6. It was now all riding on Portzy, but the pressure was also on Jules, as Cambridge led the fixture 3-0. Unfortunately, I only saw the first set as I had to go and warm up for my own match, but saw Portz win it inside twenty minutes. Jules came back well in the second set to level the score at 4 games all. Then “The Portz” turned up the heat and the final score ran 6-1, 6-4. I don’t really remember much about my match, but I do remember feeling that Alex was getting a lot back, particularly from his backhand side. And I believe he won most of the long rallies. Nevertheless, the final score ended 6-3, 6-2 to Oxford.

The 1st string match was closer than the score suggested. The first set in particular probably should have gone to Cambridge as Miles started 0-40 down in the deciding game. But to his credit he won it, and then ran away with the second set with the final score reading; 6-5, 6-2.

Well now, the rubbers stood 3-3, demanding the first deciding double match in the Lords era of hosting the Varsity Match. And we won, 6-3, 6-5.

### **Special Award:**

As well as receiving both winners’ trophies, the Oxford team were thrilled that Miles Jackson, who was outstanding throughout the match, was also presented with an award from the T&RA for being their ‘Most Improved Player’, in recognition of his rapid improvement this past year. His handicap has dropped from 30 to single figures in twelve months and his tremendous performances in the British Amateur Championship, played in the week after Varsity, saw his handicap cut to 8. He lost in the Final to multiple winner of the tournament (twenty times?), the indefatigable Julian Snow: no disgrace there! Previous winners of the T&RA award include Steve Virgona, so Miles is in illustrious company.

### **Back to the Varsity Match:**

At the post-match dinner, so splendidly hosted, once again, by tournament sponsor, Pol Roger, tribute was paid by both winning Captains, and by Simon Stubbings, as winning club President, to our sponsors, and particularly to Neptune’s support of real tennis at Oxford. We are enormously grateful to Neptune for its continuing sponsorship of the Oxford student teams and are delighted that such success is flowing from this relationship.

*Miles Jackson receiving the T&RA Award for 'Most Improved Player' from Oxford Chairman, Simon Stubbings*



## SECOND TEAM VARSITY MATCH, 1-2 MARCH 2013

### **The Men's Match**

*by Arthur Wakeley*

Friday 1st March: The big day. The Oxford Second team, of Arthur Wakeley, Johnny Whitaker, Roger Nathan and Alex Mullan made the long trek to Cambridge for the annual clash with the Tabs. The Oxonians knew it was not going to be easy, given the very strong, experienced Cambridge team who outclassed them comprehensively in handicap terms. Arriving early, there was time for a good knock on both the Cambridge courts (envy!).

Fresh off the river (something to do with rowing and Torpids...whatever they are?!), Johnny Whitaker took to the court in his 3rd seed singles game against Oli Watson, who was in last year's Cambridge Blues team. It was a tighter match-up than the score line might suggest, but despite some ferocious hitting from Johnny, Oli prevailed 6-1, 6-2. Johnny stayed on court, to be joined by Arthur Wakeley for their doubles match, which was actually the first time they had been together on court. Not ideal, as they were up against Oli Watson and Jimmy Campbell, both mid-20s handicap players. Again, the score did not reflect the closeness of the match, or its quality, with some fantastic rallies. Cambridge won 8-2. The late match finish was followed by an excellent dinner at the club with the Cambridge team, who were terrific hosts.

After a fortifying sleep and good breakfast, The Match re-commenced. Roger Nathan and Alex Mullan (the latter drafted in at last minute after Archie Cornish suffered a nasty eye injury) battled well in their doubles, but lost to a Cambridge pair that included a player of H20. Arthur then stepped up for his singles against, Jimmy Campbell, a clinical finisher, who wrapped up the first set 6-2. Arthur fought back, playing right at the top of his game, but lost 4-6 in a very tense set of tennis. 4-0 to Cambridge.

The Varsity match had now been decided, but Alex and Roger's singles still proved terrific games to watch. Alex battled hard against tidy player Alastair Kwan, whilst Roger played some exceptional tennis to

take games from Ed Kay, who would have been in the Blues but for another Varsity clash. No sets to Oxford, but no disgrace, given that the Cambridge side were stronger by at least 12 handicap points at every position.

The presentation followed. The prizes went to the winners, Cambridge, but the Oxford team didn't go home empty-handed, having gained valuable experience and enjoyed a fantastic weekend of tennis.

Our thanks go to Maggie, the OUTC Pros, to CURTC for organizing such a great tournament, to Pol Roger for the prizes and to Neptune for their continuing sponsorship.

### **The Women's Match**

*by Clare Bucknell*

After a health and safety-defying drive in a borrowed car (thank you, Maggie!), the Oxford women's Second team of Sophie Dannreuther, Clare Bucknell, Clare Wiles and Emma Stuart arrived in Cambridge with no significant damage. Sophie, a veteran of previous Varsity matches but ineligible for this year's Blues, flew in from her linguist's year in Europe to play.

Clare W played in the Second's match in 2012 (without dropping a game) but Clare B and Emma were Varsity debutantes. We'd been warned that the Cambridge side were likely to be stronger this year and that our handicaps ranged much more widely than those of our opponents. We weren't worried. Honestly!

Friday's play started with a nail-biting doubles between the two Clares and Cambridge's Venetia D'Arcy and Ameera Patel. We struggled to keep in touch with Cambridge, whose well-considered tactics proved unnerving. Combining solid volleying with irrepressible optimism, we clawed our way back to come level, and, in a tense deciding game, snatched a dramatic victory by 8 games to 7.

The second doubles pitted Sophie and Emma against Cambridge's Helen West and Catherine Sweatt. Sophie and Emma's effective play belied their brief pairing and they recorded a convincing win. A delicious CURTC lasagne was followed by a quick team drink (under Craig's watchful eye) and an early night.

Saturday's singles began with Emma's match against Catherine. Emma played strongly and closed out the match in fine style, with a straight-sets victory. Oxford was now three matches up and hungry for the fourth win that would guarantee that Varsity trophy. It came immediately. Clare W's came through against Ameera, whose low-slicing shots and unpredictable serve might have been expected to create some problems. But Clare's destructive forehand and unruffled on-court manner gave her opponent few chances as Clare thumped ball after ball into the dedans to win in two sets and seal the match for Oxford.

The pressure was now on for the last two rubbers of the women's weekend. We'd won the Varsity trophy: could we go the whole way and make it a 6-0 whitewash for the second year in succession?

Next up was Clare B, shaking with nerves but fortified by the prospect of a fine CURTC apple crumble for tea. The first set against Venetia was a close 6-4, but Clare upped her game in the second set, peppering the tambour to win 6-2. Five matches played. Five matches won.

Not a set dropped. Could Oxford number one Sophie finish the job? Emphatically, YES. Seemingly

immune to the pressure, the newly nicknamed 'Dann-ruthless' raced to victory, recording a 6-0, 6-2 win over Helen.

The Oxford team was presented with their trophy, and the winner's prizes provided by Pol Roger, and Cambridge were thanked for their sportsmanship and hospitality. The rival teams shared a convivial post-match meal, and the Oxford team headed off triumphantly, arriving home a surprising three hours later, given Clare B's extraordinary experimentation with the route.

Our thanks for a wonderful Varsity experience go to our pros, Craig and Andrew (especially to Craig for coming to Cambridge and providing many memorable catchphrases); to Maggie and Audrey, for early morning training, excellent organising and great emailing; to the men's team, for being our top supporters; to CURTC for putting on such a well-run event and making us feel so welcome; to Pol Roger for providing the prizes and wines that went to well with the wonderful tournament meals (thank you, Mrs Ludekens!); and to Neptune for their much-appreciated sponsorship.

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## A Tribute to our Sponsors

This Newsletter is quite properly principally devoted to an account of the university teams and Oxford's successes on this occasion. However in celebrating their success it is important to recognise the role that sponsors have played in assisting the teams to achieving it. With court fees and the equipment required, tennis can be an expensive game for students.

This is especially true at universities where the game has to compete with the myriad of other pursuits (including other major and minor racquet sports) available to students at minimal outlay. In order to attract and retain new young players within tennis, it is essential to make it affordable. A number of companies and individuals have recognised this challenge and rallied round in very practical ways. The support that Pol Roger gives to the annual Varsity Match held at Lord's makes that event a memorable occasion for all who are lucky enough to play or otherwise attend it. Pol Roger's kindness in providing prizes and wines for the Second Team Varsity matches has helped raise the status and excitement of that fixture.

Oxford has been fortunate in obtaining support from a variety of sources. In addition to the massive contribution that they make to the game nationally, Neptune Investment Management has been very generous in providing support to tennis at Oxford over a period of years and became the sole commercial sponsor of student tennis in 2012. This has provided invaluable help in relation to equipment, fees for courts, coaching and matches, as well as travelling expenses.

Student tennis also receives direct support from the University itself as well as a number of individuals, either through payments to the Oxford University Tennis Club, or routed via the Oxford University Tennis Foundation, which is a charity established for the promotion of university tennis in Oxford and is thus able to provide tax relief for individual donations.

Indeed, individual benefactors play a critical role in ensuring the well-being of tennis in Oxford. Comprising university alumni and old and current members, it is through their, often anonymous, support that we are able host tournaments such as the

0-9 competition and run the summer student league. The financial health of the Oxford tennis is underpinned by the senior players, either specifically through individual financial contributions, or generally through their subscriptions and court fees.

Student tennis apart, commercial sponsorship is important in its support of Oxford's internal tournaments and other events. In assisting with prizes, Pol Roger add a special dimension to these events. However, for the most part, our sponsors are local businesses. This Newsletter is printed by Mayfield Press. As will be seen from the advertisements appearing in it, others provide a wide range of services and it is hoped that members will in turn support these businesses as the occasion arises. Thus, sponsorship and donations play an important role in keeping tennis thriving in Oxford. If you would like to become involved in any way, please speak to one of the professionals or contact John Caunt at [john@johncaunt.com](mailto:john@johncaunt.com).



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*Bryan Brown (left) and Jean de Pourtalis, winners of the Grant Bates Trophy Handicap Doubles Tournament*



## **PLAYING REPORT AND FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

*by Simon Stubbings*

Although much of this Newsletter is devoted to the success of the University teams in three of the four encounters with Cambridge, a number of internal competitions have been played which have also been keenly contested.

As this edition goes to press, we have yet to discover the winners of the Aberdare, Beard and Pamela Wallis Tournaments that have been played over the past few months. However, other of our annual competitions have been completed.

2013 started with 24 pairs vying for the Grant Bates Trophy in the club handicap doubles tournament. After some closely-fought matches, Brian Brown and Jean de Pourtales prevailed in the final, beating the university women's pairing of Audrey Davies and Emily Scaysbrook.

The Wroth Cup for non-handicapped doubles was won by the brothers Miles and Rowan Jackson who beat Euan Campbell and Johnny Beale in the final. "Hot Off the Grille" emerged worthy winners of the John D Wood competition wrenching the title from "Penthouse Playboys" whose stranglehold over the tournament had for years seemed virtually unshakeable.

We are now approaching the season of summer leagues. Both the Simms and students' tournaments have always proved very popular, as participants take advantage of the opportunity to play a variety of opponents of a similar standard under competitive conditions. It is to be hoped that as many members as possible will sign up this year.

Before then there will be the chance to watch tennis of a high standard when we host the 0-9 Handicap Tournament on 19, 20 and 21 April. Oxford should be well represented by Roman Krznic, Rob Walker, Miles Jackson, Andrew Davis and Craig Greenhalgh and all these players will welcome your support.

*Wroth Cup winners Miles (left) and Rowan Jackson*



Winners of the John D Wood Cup, "Hot Off the Grille".

From left to right: Chris Peri, Lesley Smith, Ray Cooke, Roger Nathan and Jean de Pourtalis



## Committee notices

### Club Accounts

Like all similar organisations, in order to meet its overheads, the club relies on members paying their dues on time. To be fair to the entire membership it is therefore important that individuals' accounts with the club are in credit before they play or incur any other club expenses. It is the responsibility of individual members to ensure that this is the case. Balances can be checked in the Members' section of the club's website, or by asking the Pros. In the event that a member's account is overdrawn for more than two weeks, the committee may suspend rights to book and use the court, and other members should not include the overdrawn member in their bookings.

### Condensation on the Court

Periodically the court responds to abrupt changes in the weather by attracting condensation on the walls and the floor. It is extremely dangerous to play in these circumstances and the court will be closed. Members must respect this and will no longer be permitted to use the court, even at their own risk.

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