

Everyone *for* tennis

Mawdesley has one of Lancashire's most successful tennis clubs and its own Wimbledon legend.

Amanda Griffiths reports

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN COCKS





Far left: Junior member Laura Dawson
Left: First team captain Mark Bamber
Below: Officials Paul Richardson, Lydia Hale, George Walker, Elizabeth Eaves and club chairman Trevor Hale



George Walker can tell a tale or two, especially when it comes to that celebration of strawberries, sunshine and showers known as Wimbledon Fortnight. For George, now in his 80s, has umpired some of the legends of tennis and he has the green jacket to prove it.

The president of Mawdesley Tennis Club spent 20 years making crucial decisions and keeping the peace at the world's premier tournament. Ironically, it all started thanks to a downpour.

'I umpired McEnroe three or four times and I was on centre court when he beat Borg,' says George. 'I started umpiring in 1968 when it was mainly voluntary though now the top positions are filled by full time professionals.'

He began umpiring tennis when he was working in Africa. 'I came back to this country and went to Wimbledon as a spectator. It started raining and I got talking to one of the umpires and that's how I got into it.'

In spite of his years, George still relishes the start of each season and he still played until incurring a shoulder injury in September last year.

He was recently made life president of the Mawdesley club which has been celebrating its 40th anniversary. And celebration is the right word as members managed to achieve an all

time high level of success

'I'm very proud of them,' says George. 'They've been doing well for a number of years but last year was just great. The first team had been promoted to first division and finished third. That was a great achievement considering they normally end up dropping back down the next. They remained unbeaten for some time.'

'The fact our fifth team was promoted from propping up the bottom division was another great achievement.'

Lydia Hale, who looks after marketing and publicity, adds: 'It was a very successful season for all five of our teams. Three earned promotion and two finished in third place.'

'It's not very often you have such strong success across the board. It certainly hasn't happened in the time that I've been here. It just seems to have got better and better in the last three years. >



Lauren Richardson



“Wimbledon certainly spurs everyone on – in fact, the whole of the village goes a bit tennis crazy during the tournament. The amount of kids we have down here during the two weeks is unbelievable”

Left: John Mackintosh, Jo Pennington, Rachael Scofield and Mark Bamber
Below: Will Ainscough

‘As our success has grown we’ve attracted more members. Wimbledon certainly spurs everyone on – in fact, the whole of the village goes a bit tennis crazy during the tournament. The amount of kids we have down here during the two weeks is unbelievable and a lot of adults we haven’t seen before come down for a game. The trick is encouraging them to stay and play.’

Member Sam Rogerson has been playing in national tournaments in the under-16 category. He is improving all the time and is considered future Wimbledon material.

‘It’s going to be a big couple of years for him, but if he carries on playing as well as he is there’s no reason he couldn’t make it,’ says Lydia.

The club, founded in 1969, has grown from a small village facility to become a strong competitor in the

Southport and District League and now boasts around 150 junior members and 80 seniors.

‘Our junior section is the club’s other big success,’ says Lydia. ‘We’ve got great coaches and have been encouraging children to come to try free taster sessions to see if they like it.’

‘If you get taught properly when you’re young it really helps when you get older. You pick up the right skills early on and develop them as you get older.’

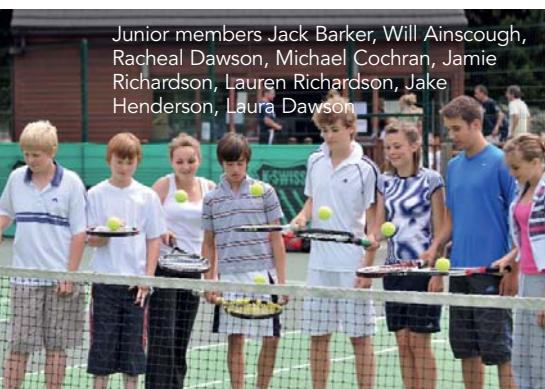
‘We’ve also got a sixth team, basically it’s a friendly-team, that encourages new members and juniors to play senior tennis and helps us select members for the other teams.’

Based at Mawdesley Village Hall, the club has four hard surface, all-weather courts as well as a new clubhouse built with funds raised by members.

‘Our members come from all around the area; during the winter we train on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and there’s social tennis on Friday and Sunday afternoons as well. Then, in the summer we will be playing matches. There’s a lot of commitment involved.’

‘We’re also different from some other local groups in the way we select our teams. It’s done on a combination of ability and commitment.’

So what are the club’s hopes for 2010, considering the success of last year? ‘I think really to continue that success and improve even further,’ says Lydia. 🌸



Junior members Jack Barker, Will Ainscough, Racheal Dawson, Michael Cochran, Jamie Richardson, Lauren Richardson, Jake Henderson, Laura Dawson

Is your club a success story that deserves to be covered in Lancashire Life? If so, contact Amanda Griffiths on amanda.griffiths@lancashirelife.co.uk or telephone 01772 329376.

Meanwhile, you can find a local tennis club by logging onto www.lta.org.uk. You can find out more about Mawdesley Tennis Club at www.mawdesleytennis.com or by calling 01257 473313.