

THE BRENTWOOD SPORTS ESSEX OPEN TENNIS TOURNAMENT 2007

Report by Richard Lehman (Treasurer & Organiser)

Having reviewed the previous years entry numbers and having received numerous requests to add Men's & Ladies Open events (i.e. no age limits) we decided to alter the format of this years tournament, the 61st Essex Open. This meant dropping the mixed doubles events (which invariably had poor entry numbers) and making some small, age related changes to other doubles events but adding Open Men's & Ladies Singles and Men's & Ladies Doubles. This meant that we would be running 22 events in 2007 as against 19 in 2006 but with the emphasis still squarely on juniors as it remains a Grade 3, Grand Prix tournament.

Following the great success of using a full-time tennis referee and independent court supervisors last year we were delighted to welcome David Fuchs of Tennis Services and his team back to Billericay. One point of interest is that despite offering entry and payment by credit card over the internet some 60% of entries were still 'on paper' & by cheque. David tells me that all his other tournaments have an 80% plus payment utilising the net – are Essex people less computer literate than other counties or are we missing something?

With enough rain over the preceding weeks to flood a significant part of England and the wettest June since records began, Billericay's tournament committee looked in some trepidation at the weather forecasts in the run up to this years Essex Open!

As usual there was a fairly slow entry level to the tournament until the last week when an explosion of interest not only took us to the highest entry level since we took over the running of the tournament in 2004 but also took us to an oversubscribed level (396 Singles entrants alone).

Being oversubscribed meant that we had to decline a number of entries which whilst being disappointing for both the organisers and the competitors at least meant, in the main, that 10.1 ratings weren't up against 5.2 ratings (or better) in the early rounds, with the inevitable result. In the event Colin Clay managed to organise another tournament to take our 'overflow' which worked out very well for all concerned.

We had planned, as usual, to run at least 8 matches per day per court on each of our ten courts plus up to 22 finals on the Saturday i.e. 502 matches! With the final Singles entry numbers at around 350, plus all the Doubles and Plate competitions we calculated that we would have to play 488 matches if all went as planned i.e. run at 98% of total capacity! Given the recent weather was this optimistic or what?

We agreed some rain 'contingency' plans with Brentwood Hard LTC (as they had done with us for their May tournament) and kept our fingers crossed.

With our wonderful sponsors (especially Brentwood Sports) in place and 50 plus Billericay club members volunteering for everything from car parking to catering, bar duty to bin emptying and toilet cleaning to clubhouse hoovering we were ready.

Sunday the 29th July duly arrived and, wonder of wonders, it stopped raining! In fact we had wonderful weather for the entire week with only one hours break for rain on the Thursday.

The only sour note of the entire week was that despite the LTA 'agreeing' in January to provide us with 18 officials to officiate on Finals Day they finally informed us the week before that they would not be sending any at all. That's the way to win hearts and minds of tennis volunteers!

Notwithstanding this disappointment we saw some fantastic tennis with Matt Pearce and Sarah Naylor both deservedly retaining their titles (full results can be seen on the Tennis Services Website).

For those who like statistics we saw a total of 534 hours of tennis, with 899 sets and 7,439 games played. The longest match took over two and a half hours!

Once again the organisers' thanks go to the members of Billericay LTC who gave up the use of their club for a week and put their backs to the wheel whenever it was required – we couldn't do it without them.

We are already planning next years tournament and would welcome any ideas for improvement or indeed constructive criticism – please e-mail richard_lehman@hotmail.com.