

# Community Tennis – Grassroots Review

## Introduction

This summary is based on the detailed work carried out and reports produced by Sue Mappin (SMC & Associates) with support research from TrioPlus. The main thrust of the work falls within 'community tennis' with direct links to the plans for 'competitions', 'coaches', 'tennis support' and 'business operations' as set out in the Blueprint for British tennis ([www.blueprintforbritishtennis.co.uk](http://www.blueprintforbritishtennis.co.uk)).

With a few notable exceptions, British tennis has had limited success in developing the game in the community. The LTA has been subject to criticism for failings in leading community tennis and for a detached, fragmented, poorly communicated approach.

At a time when sport itself has to find better ways to be of relevance to the wider corporate agenda, sports such as football and cricket have out-performed tennis. They have built better relationships with Local Authorities and have played a more active role in County Sports Partnerships. This has meant that these sports have been more successful in securing funds for grassroots/community activities.

Now the LTA has committed to taking the lead in addressing community tennis issues. This will mean improving access for players of all ages and abilities and delivering the support to attract and retain people to play tennis. This is part of the Blueprint for British tennis, which ensures that all aspects of tennis are joined up and included in a long-term, sustainable approach to the sport.

# Key findings summary

This comprehensive review was wide ranging and involved qualitative feedback from all sectors of the game from grassroots to performance, within the UK and abroad. (There was little in the way of quantitative performance data available.)

- There is a **perception** that the majority of LTA resource goes into supporting high performance tennis and that community tennis is not seen to be important. This is not the case and points clearly to the need to communicate more effectively with all tennis stakeholders.
- Tennis has an **image problem** that makes it difficult to promote and limits its ability to compete with other sports.
- The **LTA's former initiatives** 'Play Tennis' and 'RAW Tennis' are generally seen as a waste of resource as they are not linked to a development programme and are unsustainable in the community. Further, the majority of LTA initiatives have been targeted at children and, in many cases, existing players. Little has been done to encourage people over the age of 18 (many of whom have played tennis before) to revisit the sport.
- The standard of coaching and communication with **community coaches** is poor. A regular dialogue with coaches on the ground needs to be established and there is a need to recognise the importance of coaches working at this level.
- Community-based **talent ID** needs to be established as does a simple, easy to understand **competitive structure** at community level on a local and national basis. This should start with **intra/inter-school competitions** which should be team-based and organised via School Sports Partnerships.
- More needs to be done to **support tennis in the education sector** (to include teacher training, coach education and volunteer recruitment) – in particular, the development of a new national schools programme to bring together the key components necessary to develop tennis and raise coaching standards.

- There is a need to establish a sustainable **national parks tennis programme**. There are some good examples of successful development in this area that need to be assessed and taken further to provide sustainable models which could then be used to promote the development of other, similar facilities. However, the practical issues such as early closure, security and planning permission challenge the development of outdoor playing centres in parks.
- The LTA's **relationships with Local Authorities and County Sports Partnerships** (of particular importance where Local Authorities are not active in sports development) are weak. There is a limited understanding of the main issues and a lack of business/financial information on tennis delivery 'models'. This makes it difficult to sell tennis to the public sector.
- Indoor facilities are essential to sustain tennis development activity. There is concern over the lack of **general support, including revenue, to existing ITI centres** approaching the end of their current leases. ITI centres should act as a playing hub and link with schools and outdoor playing centres in the locality. Relationships with all centres should be re-established and audits undertaken to understand the specific challenges, financial sustainability and potential. The development and location of future ITIs must be carefully reassessed.
- In areas where individuals have worked successfully at community level with Local Authorities and other partners, this work should be recognised and rewarded. These **examples of best practice** need to be factually documented so they can be shared and, where appropriate, adopted across the whole of British tennis. Learning opportunities arising from the experience of other sports working in the community should also be embraced.
- The **Counties** have the responsibility for **public sector liaison** and delivery. There is considerable variance of success between counties. Changes in priorities (to make time), development of skill sets (partnership working, facility development), and further resource allocation are vital to future success.



## Next steps

We are confident that the LTA can commit significant new funding to community tennis; the challenge becomes using this resource in the best way.

To do this we will establish a realistic, phased implementation plan, manage people's expectations (we can't deliver on all the ideas and demands and we must explain why, using a fact-based rationale) attract the right people, establish the right organisation structure and ensure that all parts of British tennis link up and collaborate effectively.

We will tackle the politics head on, communicate well and do what is best for British tennis.

Based on the findings and the recommendations we will take the following actions to ensure that we start the journey to transform community tennis in the right way. These will be the first steps of long-term, sustained action.

- Set up the Tennis Foundation and agree its working remit. This will be synchronised with the work of the LTA to avoid any duplication and to utilise the LTA's county-based workforce, volunteers and core services.
- Agree the organisation structure and recruit the right people to take responsibility for community tennis.
- Establish case studies and best practice examples throughout all aspects of community tennis (facilities, programmes, coaching, partnerships). This will form the basis for ongoing networking opportunities for all stakeholders in this area of tennis development.
- Audit current ITI facilities and develop an action plan.
- Start work on talent ID, coach education and development and the establishment of a competitive framework.
- Optimise existing fundraising activities and inward investment opportunities to develop new, more effective approaches.