

Development of tennis as a leisure activity



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The development and significance of tennis as a Leisure Activity (Mainly in the UK)

1. The History and Development of tennis. (Mainly in the UK)

According to The Cliff Richard Tennis Development Fund 2000, tennis is a world-class competitive sport captivating millions of players and fans all round the world. It was in France that the game tennis as we know it today really came into being. During the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries it became the highly fashionable sport of kings and noblemen a far cry from being played by the lower classes. The development fund 2000 describes how real tennis was actually very different to the game that we know today. The game was played indoors, in large galleries with jutting roofs and points were won according to how the ball was played off of the gallery walls, rather like squash. This concept is very different to today's Lawn Tennis, where the rectangular court is laid out on a grass surface and the play is within marked boundaries, not off of the walls. After its initial rise in popularity with the French nobility, tennis spread throughout Europe, becoming particularly popular in England. Today, Wimbledon and the UK are associated with lawn tennis.

Cliff Richard's Development fund describes how the changes in tennis have taken place over the years and how the shift has moved tennis from being associated with the upper classes to a sport which is played at all different levels and at every level of the social classes. During the 19th century when Victorian prosperity in England prompted a significant revival, courts were built in many famous country houses and the first tennis clubs providing facilities for members began to appear. The biggest boost for tennis however

came in 1875. As said by the development Fund 2000, The All England Croquet Club, which had formed in 1869 had failed to attract enough visitors and in 1875 they decided to offer Lawn Tennis as an added attraction. The new game was an instant success, so much so that in 1877 the name of the club was changed to the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club. This highlights that the popularity of tennis has been growing for many decades thus gives us a good indication that it will continue to prosper.

The Wimbledon Championship has been one of the most significant developments in the history of tennis. This event alone has contributed to a huge numbers of followers and participants throughout the UK and illustrates the development of tennis as we know it today. In the 1930s the game became highly fashionable in the UK, led by British stars such as Fred Perry and Don Budge and International Champions such as Henri Lacoste. Then, into the 1990s the championships became more popular than ever – particularly as Great Britain's hopes for a champion became rekindled with the likes of Greg Rusedski and Tim Henman. Now, entering 2006 we are witnessing the rise of young Andrew Murray who is taking the tennis circuit by storm and he will hopefully encourage and boost tennis numbers within the UK.

The Lawn Tennis Association has outlined a number of ways in which it has attempted to translate the enthusiasm generated by the Wimbledon Championships each year into lasting benefits and continually develop tennis on a yearly basis. Some examples include; the sponsored campaign, ' Play Tennis', which is an initiative that offered free tennis lessons with the Lawn Tennis Association coaches in April and May 2004. The Lawn Tennis

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Association confirms that in 2004, 8, 000 Londoners participated in the scheme and as a result around a third joined their local tennis clubs after playing. This highlights the significance of tennis within the UK and that the sport is held in high esteem. Perhaps now it is important to expand its target market and appeal to different socio-economic groups. Further, the Lawn Tennis Association launched an Ariel Tennis Ace campaign which was a 'talent search' for young players, the winner of which received coaching with John McEnroe during the Wimbledon Championships. It is important to note that tennis is such a significant sport within the UK that such competitions are respected and widely sought after.

Other ways in which the Lawn Tennis Association has developed and increased the popularity in the UK include the introduction of a Tennis Show which has been running since April 2004 which was linked in with the Fitness Show and offered free coaching, access to clubs and information. Further, in order to establish a larger ratio of children who play tennis the organisation pioneered the Wimbledon Kid's Zone; whilst the Championships were taking place, a children's area is established to introduce children to tennis.

Approximately 6, 000 children attended in 2004 and lastly, 'The Road to Wimbledon' initiative was set up for young players to lure them into tennis and encourage promising young talent which will help boost tennis numbers. The incentive to entering this competition was that the winners were given the opportunity to play at Wimbledon in August.

Nowadays, sporting events tend to be sponsored by major companies in order to generate more money. Last year, American Express sponsored a five-day event next to Tower Bridge with large screens televising

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Wimbledon matches, tennis training and held a celebrity tennis night which raised money for the Sport Relief Charity. The Lawn Tennis Association supports any private sponsorship for these free public events because it helps develop the sport. Moreover, it is obvious that much is being done to develop tennis within the UK because Sport England has launched a website -[www. activeplaces. com](http://www.activeplaces.com)- this Internet site has produced a list of facilities for all sports, including the locations of every tennis court in London. Sport England believes that the site's usefulness could be enhanced if it keeps records of the condition of facilities to ensure the courts upkeep and increase the number of tennis players in the UK. The Lawn Tennis Association believes that currently a third of local authority tennis courts are in a state of disrepair, this information needs to be passed onto the local authorities to be addressed, otherwise tennis could cease to play a significant sporting role in the UK. Also, if information of facility conditions is recorded it will provide a more realistic picture of sports resources in London and may serve as a prompt to local authorities to improve their local facilities.

2. The Organisation of tennis.

The Lawn Tennis Association's work and investment is based around three main priority areas, these include tennis clubs, junior players and performance. The organisation has been trying to make British tennis more inclusive and available to a wide number for many years. The reasons for targeting the different areas and widening their target market are to attract more and better players. Nowadays, the Lawn Tennis Association is focusing on how and where tennis is played and organised in the UK. The reason for this is to establish where the best facilities are and to improve the areas

which are in disrepair. In order to better organise tennis within the UK, the Lawn Tennis Association has introduced an initiative called ' Club Vision' which aims to provide progressive clubs with greater support and resources at both a national and county level and to ensure that clubs can play a greater part in making the UK into a stronger tennis nation and make it as popular and generate a following as great as that of football.

' Club Vision' is described by the Lawn Tennis Association as being a multi-million pound investment programme that puts clubs at the heart of British Tennis and also supports public ' pay and play' indoor tennis centres, schools and local authority venues. The Lawn Tennis Association joined forces with the Sports Council and the All England Lawn Tennis Club in 1986 to launch the Indoor Tennis Initiative designed to develop indoor tennis centres around Britain. The main benefit of ' Club Vision' is that it is able to help any club throughout the UK regardless of size and therefore as facilities are better they can promote and attempt to attract many people. This shows that tennis is becoming more organised in the UK perhaps as a result of the increased availability of courts, the affordability of equipment and the increased media interest and coverage of tennis tournaments and championships.

According to Sport England, the London Assembly's Culture Sport and Tourism Committee met with them and the Lawn Tennis Association to discuss tennis in London in 2004. The aim of the meeting was to establish how the Wimbledon Championship could propel and promote tennis within London and the rest of the UK. Further, the bodies discussed and considered ease of access to tennis courts in London and deliberated over club

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organization and costs of using publicly owned tennis courts. Throughout the talks, certain projects were discussed which encourage young people to get involved in tennis (such as the Westway Tennis centre), and further they examined how the Mayor, Sport England and the Lawn Tennis Association could encourage more Londoners to pick up a racquet. There is more incentive for people to take up tennis due to the 2, 600 tennis clubs which have affiliated with the Lawn Tennis Association via their local county office. The development and introduction of so many clubs highlights the improvement of tennis as a leisure activity.

Currently, the Lawn Tennis Association estimates are that two-thirds of local authority courts nationally are in a state of disrepair and nevertheless the cost of hiring local authority courts stands between £2-£6 per hour for adults. Most tennis activities are run through such organisations as the Lawn Tennis Association and All England Tennis Club. As a result of these clubs it is possible for people to enquire as to their nearest club or courts and increase the probability of people playing tennis as knowledge is more readily available.

3. The Social Structure of Participation.

In my opinion tennis has always been classified as a rich mans sport. This might be due to the fact that when tennis originated it was played by the Kings, Queens and nobility. This stigma has now shifted however, there are still certain socio-demographics who shy away from the sport. According to the Lawn Tennis Association, 2. 9million people aged four years and upwards played tennis in the UK in 2003. Further, this is reinforced by the British Embassy who suggests that around five million people play tennis in the UK.

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Either way, this is a large number but there does not compete with the number of people that play football. Of the 2.9 million tennis players the Lawn Tennis Association estimates that 441,000 of these people play tennis in London; 137,000 of them playing regularly. In the UK many of the tennis campaigns and organisations aim to attract the younger generation to take up tennis. This it is no surprise that the younger generation in the UK are likely to play more tennis in the future than that of the current older generation.

In contrast to the number of tennis players in the UK, American Tennis Life Magazine, which conducted a survey on tennis, illustrates that 23.5 million Americans play tennis annually. Of this, 52 per cent of players were men and 48 per cent were women with the average age of these players being 29. Further, the percentage of women players to men is reflected in the ratio of spectatorship. McNamee, (2001) illustrates that 48 per cent of women watch tennis compared to 52 per cent of men. I am surprised that women on average play less and watch less tennis. The abovementioned illustrates that tennis is indeed a thriving sport within the UK but simultaneously illustrate that there is scope for growth within these figures.

So, it is important to establish the type of people who do not play tennis and the reasons for their lack of participation in the sport. The kind of people not playing tennis are those who are in the lower social classes who cannot afford to pay for a club membership, those in areas where facilities are in a state of disrepair and those from ethnic minorities, the latter will be discussed further. Moreover, Sport England and the Lawn Tennis Association have identified the following barriers to greater participation in tennis in

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London, some of which include; cost (however in reality this is more down to peoples perception of the sport - studies show that the actual cost of tennis membership is more than half what people estimate). Also, poor local authority facilities and a lack of investment in facilities has meant that people in certain areas are just unable to play tennis. Further, the weather plays a large role in determining the months of the year in which tennis is played. Those with no access to indoor courts are not likely to play tennis outside the summer months which results in lower numbers of people who play tennis. Moreover, Sport England has established that there is no co-ordinated approach to tennis for people with disabilities, thus limiting the development of tennis as a leisure activity. Lastly, due to the immense popularity and plugging of other sports such as football, competition with other leisure activities and sports creates a loss of interest in playing tennis once young people have left school.

Furthermore, according to Gabriel, D from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), black players are noticeably absent from tennis. Supposedly, poverty is cited as a major factor, with 57 per cent of people from ethnic minorities socially excluded from sports on the grounds of destitution. Gabriel, D believes that a 'white sporting establishment' effectively excludes people from ethnic minorities from getting involved in 'the organisation and governance of sport' at every level. In other words, the lack of black people in decision-making roles within sports organisations means there is little opportunity for them to ascend to senior and more influential roles that could promote their wider involvement and influence in sport. McLean, L reinforces the fact that the ethnic minorities do not take part in sport, compared with

the national average. Supposedly, people from ethnic minorities are keen to give sports such as tennis a go, but they do not have access to facilities. Thus in order to ensure that tennis remains a popular sport and continues to grow it is essential that every local government looks to improve facilities in their area and encourage ethnic minorities.

Every year, Wimbledon is broadcast on television and in its own right is one of the UK's major sporting events. According to the Lawn Tennis Association, Sport England spent approximately £18.7 million on tennis facilities, coaching and promotion and outreach in London in 2003. This perhaps demonstrates that tennis in the UK is in fact on the increase. What we must ensure is that we have the infrastructure in place to cope with larger numbers. The Lawn Tennis Association believes that the most immediate benefit from the Wimbledon Championships is the revenue generated by the event. The 2003 competition brought in £25.8 million (net income) which was invested back into tennis initiatives nationally. However, in order to see tennis become more popular it is essential to promote all year round and eradicate the idea that it is a summer sport. There is of course little that the Lawn Tennis Association can do to change the weather but it should look to invest in indoor courts and floodlighting through its Club Vision programme and Indoor Tennis Initiative. In 2003, the Lawn Tennis Association committed £2.28 million to facilities in London, 30 per cent of the organisations fund. Since 2001 it has invested over £4.89 million in 16 major tennis projects in London.

Further, Gabriel, D from the Commission for Racial Equality has reported that black people are very interested in tennis thus there is scope to increase the

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number of tennis players in the UK. In my opinion tennis is a growing sport. This is further emphasised by UK Sport (2001), which has explained how the management Board of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has decided to engage with Sport England and the Lawn Tennis Association in an informal consortium to seek planning permission for the redevelopment of facilities at the Bisham Abbey Sports Centre, enabling it to become a Centre of Excellence for both sports. This illustrates that organisations believe that tennis is a worthy investment for the future.

Further, Since September 2004, construction has been underway on the Lawn Tennis Association's new National Tennis Centre (NTC) in Roehampton. If tennis was showing signs of decline there would not be so many initiatives or campaigns running to improve facilities throughout the UK. The site will provide a single site of national focus for tennis in Great Britain, and will open in late 2006. The reasons for a National Tennis Centre according to the Lawn Tennis Association are that in 1999 an extensive review of the sport was undertaken and it arose that tennis has effectively turned into a social leisure activity for a few, rather than a competitive sport to be enjoyed by many millions.

In all, the evidence points to a rise in popularity of the game tennis. There is still plenty of scope for growth and the introduction of more ethnic minorities to the sport.

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