



TENNIS

This recently-launched, high-performance tennis academy already boasts 42 European and World-ranked players. Karen Maxwell asks chairman and tennis director, Mike Walker, about his coaching concept and his ambitious plans for the future

How long have you been involved with tennis?

I'm a former ranked tennis player, a Davis Cup player and captain and I've played at three Wimbledon tournaments. After my competitive playing days, I took the role of national training senior manager at the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and worked as a television tennis commentator both in the UK and in Hong Kong.

How and why did you set up the Win Tennis Academy?

We felt there was a unique opportunity to develop a performance-based academy which offered tennis players the chance to live on site, train on site and be properly educated on site. This idea became a reality when we opened an academy at Bisham Abbey in September 2006. This base was the original home of the Rover LTA School that nurtured the country's top tennis juniors in the mid-1990s.

What are Win Tennis' sporting links and how is it funded?

Win Tennis enjoys a very good relationship with the LTA, the International Tennis Association and works closely with Sport England. The academy is funded through myself and fellow Win Tennis director



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Andrew McKenzie James and players' parents. The scholarship sponsors include the LTA, Head (sports apparel), TTK UK (sportswear) and Sport England.

We are also looking to develop commercial partnerships with brands that wish to become associated with Win Tennis. There will be many commercial opportunities to tie up with our existing marketing and public relations programme to build an association brand with Win Tennis, in both

The Win Tennis mission statement:

Win Tennis is committed to providing quality tennis training for all. By working closely with the local community, Win Tennis will search for future champions and fast track these players on the winning pathway. Our aim is to help players maximise their potential. We achieve this by putting the right people in the right place.

the 'champions of the future' initiative and with opportunities that arise from the leisure development.

What's the concept and who does it cater for?

The Win Tennis coaching programme is designed to produce champions and we are working closely with the LTA and other national governing bodies towards achieving this goal. The academy has the highest-quality coaching team in the UK.

Our programmes are centred around youth, however, senior players can also benefit from our comprehensive training. By working with the local community, Win Tennis is also on the look out for future champions.

The Ariel Tennis programme is designed for children under the age of 10. It's divided into three traffic light, colour-coded stages and the child moves from red to green as their technique improves. As the court size, racket length, ball speed and the length of games all increase players are ready to move on to the full game.

Who are the potential tennis champions that you currently have on your books?

We currently have 42 European and World-ranked players on our books. Six are ranked inside the world's Top 100 in the ITF rankings, and are certainly players to watch for the future. These players are: Marcus Willis, Neil Pauffley, Niall Angus, Tom Knight, Michael Thompson and Johanna Konta.

Our senior players include Melanie South, who has played at Wimbledon twice and won the Surbiton doubles with Karen Peterson last year. Robert Varga has also won two development tournaments in Serbia and Sean Thornley is the Under 18 National Masters winner.



We plan to develop Sheffield's 23-acre Graves Tennis and Leisure Centre into a world-class tennis centre of excellence

Whose who in the Win Tennis operations team?

We believe we have one of the most experienced coaching teams in the UK. We have 17 coaches with the likes of former British Number 1 and coach to the Canadian Davis Cup team, Mark Cox, as our head of junior tennis. Our international squad coach is Andrew Richardson, who played at Wimbledon seven times and former British No 3, Martin Lee, is our international academy coach. Former Junior Davis Cup and Top 30 Spanish player, Roberto Rubio, is also one of our international coaches who brings a wealth of experience – having previously worked with Rafael Nadal, Carlos Moya and Alan Mackin (Davis Cup Great Britain). Farid Bentaous, our senior academy coach, coached three Top 100 players – including Nicolas Kiefer. Former Royal Marine, personal trainer and duathlete, Richard O'Connor, heads up the fitness and lifestyle management role.

Can you give details on Win Tennis' move towards leisure operation?

Win Tennis recently negotiated with Sheffield City Council to purchase the 23-acre Graves tennis and Leisure Centre, with a view to developing the facility into a world-class tennis centre of excellence and LTA high

performance centre. The site was valued at £2.65m in 2004 and we are seeking to raise £5m by way of bank finance secured against the site.

The development will be constructed on a phased basis and extended to provide a private-member tennis, health and leisure spa, together with an extensive community section.

Phase one will see the building of a new swimming pool and community sports complex, which will house one of the largest DDA-compliant accommodation blocks available to athletes with disabilities in the UK (in partnership with Sport England).

Phase two, at a cost of £1.5m, will see the construction of four indoor clay courts – the first facility of its kind in the north of England. It will also include the construction and resurfacing of 15 outdoor tennis courts – made up of eight acrylic and seven clay courts.

Phase three will see the private leisure provision developed at an estimated cost of £10m. This is expected to attract 5,000 members. In addition we are also negotiating with Sheffield United Football Club to dispose of a 10-acre part of the site, to allow them to continue in their youth development programme. For more information visit: www.wintennis.com.