

SPORTING LIFE

CLUB OF THE WEEK



BLUE DAY: Chelsea Community FC, pictured at their training on Friday night, with the five trophies collected during a memorable footballing summer

Is this Chelsea's most successful squad ever?

► Five trophies in a year make the club's community team the greatest. **Tim Harrison** went along to training

GLANCE round the car park at Chelsea's Cobham training ground and you'll see John Terry's Bentley, Michael Ballack's Porsche, a 1986 Honda with a blue disabled badge, a Ferrari... hang on. Which superstar has the old banger?

The Blues may top the Premiership, but Chelsea is really an extended family with 10 community football teams including Chelsea Community FC, a boisterous, enthusiastic bunch of footballers drawn from a multitude of different disability groups.

You may not find them in Stringfellows at 2am, and they may opt for St Austell over St Tropez, but they wear royal blue, they fearlessly attack 50:50 balls and they are arguably the most successful squad in Chelsea's 104-year history.

CCFC reached six finals this summer (including a European championship), lifting five trophies.

The team name is an

umbrella for a host of teams – male and female – backed by the club with coaching, training pitches and kit, and drawn from all impairment groups.

Two per cent of club turnover (£4.3million) is ploughed into community projects, including tackling gang violence via football training.

It's an aspect of Chelsea overlooked by a media obsessed with top stars, and mesmerised by owner Roman Abramovich's billions.

But it is part of an empire which means a great deal to the Russian owner, according to Simon Taylor, head of corporate social responsibility at the club.

"The work Chelsea do in the community comes from the owner and the board," he said.

"The club believes football is a lot more than just a game on Saturday. It can have a real impact on young people, and we use football to help engage them."

As well as the pan-disability Chelsea Community FC (which includes limbless, deaf, Down's syndrome and visually impaired players, and several with learning difficulties), the club also runs training sessions for amputee players, and has a wheelchair team which trains and plays on the indoor surface



TOP TEAM: Chelsea Community FC players train at Wandsworth's Wandle Centre on Friday, under the watchful eye of trainer Rob Seale (right)



at Leatherhead Leisure Centre in Surrey.

Football+ development officer Rob Seale, 26, has also worked with the Middlesex FA to set up a blind football team, who play using a ball full of ball bearings while relying on echoes from the pitchside fence and clapping sounds from supporters to visualise the boundary lines.

"They have amazing spatial awareness," said

Rob, who has been a Chelsea trainer for nine years. "The 2012 Paralympics will be a great shop window, and a few of our players already play at international level."

Chelsea also run a team of players with cerebral palsy, and there is a disabled team specifically for ladies. Wider community activities include a men's health programme run with NHS Hammersmith & Fulham.

Chelsea's backing is

vital, says Rob. "It's a massive pull. If there's a chance to represent Chelsea, it's a huge attraction. We go to Cobham via the club's community project, and have regular training slots there, plus special sessions."

From humble beginnings in 1994 (once a week in a park), Chelsea Community FC has grown into a respected part of the club, training each Friday at Wandsworth's Wandle Centre. First-team superstars get involved in sessions at Cobham, where the club's proud boast is that more Chelsea players participate in community programmes than at any other top-flight club.

"The team wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the fantastic support and funding from the Limbless Association and Football Foundation," added player Charlie Poole.

"Not only is Chelsea Community a great disabled football club, but it is a place where you can make friends and really enjoy the beautiful game."

Colleague Jay Beckford, part of the team which lifted the Dalecarlia Cup in Sweden in the summer, agreed. "I feel excellent coming to training, being among people with different disabilities. It's amazing," he said.



RUNNER UP: Charlie Hambly seen during the women's singles final at the Hartwood club

Hartwood LTC Finals Saturday 12 September 2009

Time	Draw	Score
10.00 am	10 & Under Mixed Singles Jack Kelsey [1] - Sid Stocking [3]	4-1 3-4 1-0(12)
10.00 am	12 & Under Boys Singles Milo Evans [2] - Angus Lintern [3]	6-0 6-0
11.00 am	10 & Under Girls & Boys Doubles Joe Kelly [1] - Matt Morgan Jack Kelsey [2] - Oliver Hood	4-3 4-2
11.00 am	12 & Under Girls Singles Monique Magyar [1] - Lydia Brzeskwinski [2]	6-1 6-1
12.00 pm	14 & Under Boys Singles Jeffrey Magyar [1] - Emet Jaffe-Pearce [3]	6-1 6-2
12.00 pm	14 & Under Girls Singles Monique Magyar [1] - Alice Duns [2]	6-2 6-1
12.30 pm	Women's Singles Alice Shimmin [1] - Charlotte Hambly [2]	6-1 6-3
12.30 pm	Men's Singles Chris Twiss [2] - Chris Beggs [1]	5-7 6-3 7-6(2)
1.30 pm	14 & Under Boys Doubles Matteo Del Maestro [1] - Milo Evans Robert O'Leary - Angus Lintern	6-4 6-1
1.30 pm	14 & Under Girls Doubles Martha Bellamy [2] - Lydia Brzeskwinski Jona Stirling - Flora Stirling	4-6 6-1 1-0(3)
2.30 pm	16 & Under Girls Singles Monique Magyar [2] - Zahra Ahmed	6-0 6-1
2.30 pm	Men's Doubles Tim Behrens [1] - Andy Bell [5] Robert Sadler - William Bell	6-1 7-6(3)
3.00 pm	16 & Under Boys Doubles Samuel Kaplan [1] - Robert O'Leary Jack Mcallister - Jack Pilgrim	6-2 1-6 6-3
3.00 pm	16 & Under Girls Doubles Zahra Ahmed [2] - Beth Archibald Sophie Clarke - Isabel Carpenter	6-7(4) 6-3 1-0(5)
4.30 pm	16 & Under Boys Singles Jeffrey Magyar [1] - Alex Monk [2]	6-3 6-1
4.30 pm	Mixed Doubles Charlotte Hambly [2] - Hermione Twiss [1] Robert Sadler - Chris Twiss	6-4 7-6(3)
6.00 pm	Women's Doubles Deborah Findling [1] - Charlotte Hambly [2] Alice Shimmin - Sarah Keating	Walkover

Club finalists take it to Hart

► Close friends serve up three-hour final in Shepherds Bush competition
► Hartswood club hosts matches for range of age groups

ALISTAIR KLEEBAUER

IT COULDN'T quite rival this year's Wimbledon final between Roger Federer and Andy Roddick in terms of length.

But for commitment and sportsmanship, the men's final at the Hartswood Lawn Tennis Club's end of season tournament on September 12 ran it a close second.

Close friends and Shepherds Bush residents Christopher Twiss, 22 of Rylett Road, and Chris Beggs, 23, of Palgrave Road, battled through an epic three-hour match, with Twiss finally emerging victorious, 5-7, 6-3, 7-6.

"We've been friends for a long time so we know each other's games well, which always helps," said Twiss.

Some powerful base-line play presented his opponent with the first set at the Shepherds Bush club. But as Twiss' confidence rose, so did the variation in his shots, allowing him to claw his way back into the match and claim the final two sets.

The men didn't steal all the limelight though as the 95-year-old club, hidden among the houses by Hartswood Road, hosted a range of finals across all ages.

The women's match was a more one-sided affair, with defending champion Alice Shimmin, 49, of Linden Gardens, Chiswick, executing a well thought-out game plan to ease past opponent, Charlie Hambly, 32, of Stamford Brook Avenue, Hammersmith, with a 6-1, 6-3 victory.

"I didn't have as much of a strategy as Alice did," said Charlie.

"I was trying to pass her when she came into the net but I wasn't able to find those shots. I'd been practising them beforehand but I couldn't find them on the day."

Back on the court for the mixed doubles, the men's champion revealed the key to his sporting talents in his choice of partner: his mother.

Though they eventually lost, Hermione Twiss, 60 of Rylett Road, Shepherds Bush, was clear about who the real coach was.

"He gives me tips," she said. "But it's a lot of fun playing together. We have a great understanding usually and we don't berate each other too much."

In fact, cross words, angry exchanges or broken racquets were entirely missing from the day's events. Perhaps the professionals should seek out this club in future.



MATCH POINTERS: Chris Twiss (top) won the men's singles against Chris Beggs (right), while Alice Shimmin (above) successfully defended her women's title

PICTURES BY JUSTIN THOMAS

FORE HAND

● Hartswood club member Deborah Finding describes the joys of finals day as an umpire and player – all while being heavily pregnant...



SINCE being given a rainbow racquet at an age early enough for it to be wooden, I have forsaken interest in all other sports in favour of tennis.

Which is how it comes to pass that Alice Shimmin (my doubles partner and best friend) and I find ourselves deeply entrenched in the fun of Hartswood LTC finals day again.

On finals day the juniors and adults mix and one of the principal pleasures for me is to umpire a junior match and see how the kids are coming along. At almost seven months pregnant, the main challenge of the match is getting me into the umpire's chair, but with that accomplished, play can begin.

All the junior matches are good-natured, with no racquet-throwing or histrionics, and though the Under 12 girls' match I umpire is ably won by Monique Magyar, both girls play well.

Monique then goes on to win both the U14 and U16 girls' titles, before running home to get her pet rabbit, Caramel, to share in her victory celebrations.

Though I got knocked out of both the women's singles (which Alice wins) and the mixed doubles at the semi-final stage, Alice and I make it into the women's doubles final.

Sadly, one of the other finalists (who is also seven months pregnant) has injured her ankle and has to pull out. We're keen to still play on the day, especially as my granny is in attendance, so an exhibition final is quickly

arranged against two other worthy opponents, Pam Craig and Martine Biddle.

With no pressure on the match, everyone has the chance to have fun and go for the occasional silly shot. Play is paused as Alice notices a squirrel running across the netting behind her.

"You keep watching that squirrel, Alice," Pam says as she quickly fires down a serve to her side. Unorthodox tactics aside, we manage to pull off a win in the end. It's our third consecutive women's doubles title at the club.

Not bad for a pair in which one of us is heavily pregnant and the other has just turned 50. Although I am as likely to win the lottery (which I don't play) as Wimbledon, I can't imagine giving up on tennis.

There's always something to be improved, and best of all, it never feels like exercise, just playing.

I hope my daughter will feel the same way. There's a wooden rainbow racquet hanging on the wall of her nursery, just in case...



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