

SPORTING LIFE

CLUB OF THE WEEK

HARTSWOOD TENNIS CLUB

► Fees affordable to as many people as possible are an important part of life at this Shepherds Bush sporting venue, as **Tim Harrison** finds out

TENNIS clubs have an unfortunate reputation for snobbish, elitism and exclusivity, and seem bedevilled by images of old buffers in striped jackets propping up bars with their umpteenth pink gin of the afternoon.

Not so the Hartswood Tennis Club in Shepherds Bush, a club which operates for enthusiastic tennis lovers, with no room for loafers, loungers or amiable drunks.

"It's an affordable club for people who want to play tennis," stressed chairman Andrew Monk, 49, who emphasised that the club 'expects a certain standard' of playing ability.

The good news is, the club is committed to helping people reach that standard, thanks to junior tournaments, summer camps and enthusiastic coaches.

Serving Hammersmith, Shepherd's Bush, Chiswick and Acton, the Hartswood club is located down a tucked-away lane between numbers 31 and 33 Hartswood Road, Shepherds Bush.

There is a modern clubhouse (replacing an old version which burnt down 20 years ago) with kitchen, lounge, meeting rooms, recreation room and a table tennis table.

Outside are six all-weather, hard-surface courts, open through the year. Three are floodlit for night play.

The summer's play culminates in the early September club finals day, which features a surprisingly high standard of tennis.

"The club is around 100 years old, and was set up originally as a lawn tennis club; part of the community, and run by members for members, never for profit," said Andrew, who was responsible for the club's juniors before taking on the chairman's role.

"We have new courts, new floodlights, and we



focus on playing tennis, not on bars and shops. The atmosphere is very friendly, although occasionally if you look at blogs, some people say we're snooty!"

Cake also features prominently... afternoon teas, provided by members, are a feature of weekends – a reward for hard-fought matches on court.

Weekend afternoons also involve 'mix-ins' when it's usually possible to get a game against people of a comparable standard, while the club is also represented in the Middlesex leagues.

Charity work is important, too. The Macmillan Trust holds a tournament at the club, and the juniors have been active raising money for their pet charity, the Microloan Foundation, which provides seed-funding to women in Africa wanting to set up local businesses. This year nearly £3,000 was raised for the good cause.

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Andrew, who has been a club member for eight years and lives a short walk from the courts, describes his own standard as that of a 'typical club player'.

He plays for the club's third team, but confesses that his toughest games are against his 17-year-old son, Alex, who beat him for the first time two years ago – to the immense amusement of watching members.

The key to the club is its affordability. Membership fees are under £300 a year, with big discounts for seniors, juniors, couple and weekday-only players.

Under 16s, for instance, only pay £80 a year. "We're not professionals, so the costs are extremely low," said Andrew.

If you know how to hold a racquet, and want to improve your game and enjoy a slice of cake after a decent game, it could be just the place to join.

● *The Hartswood Tennis Club is located at Hartswood Gardens, 31-33 Hartswood Road, W12 9NE. Call 020 8746 1390. For more details, visit: www.hartswoodtennis.co.uk*

Love Harts

RETURNS: (Clockwise from left) Hartswood Tennis Club chairman Andrew Monk, the courts, junior member Hugh Bellamy and Shoko Saeki

PROJECT WILL SERVE UP IMPROVED TENNIS COURTS

● **WORK** to transform dilapidated tennis courts into a new centre of excellence has begun in Fulham.

The £378,000 project includes the complete refurbishment of 12 courts in Bishop's Park, with new floodlights over five of them to allow for longer play in winter months, and the creation of four miniature courts for children.

The first six courts are expected

to be ready in December, with the rest following in March.

The project is jointly funded by Hammersmith & Fulham Council and the Lawn Tennis Association, which gave a £150,000 grant, along with a £20,000 contribution from the exclusive Queen's Club in West Kensington, which will pay for the miniature courts.

H&F cabinet member Greg

Smith said: "This is excellent news for everyone who enjoys playing tennis.

"There are so many wonderful sporting facilities in Hammersmith & Fulham and we are delighted that we will soon be able to add these improved tennis courts to that list."

And Roger Draper, chief executive of the Lawn Tennis

Association, said: "This is an excellent opportunity to improve the tennis on offer to the local community in Hammersmith & Fulham.

"The new floodlights will mean that we can extend the number of playing hours at Bishop's Park, as part of the LTA and Sport England's commitment to supporting year-round tennis." **Jon Weisgard**



COURT REVAMP: Tennis coach Justyn Johal teaches Kayla Connolly at Bishop's Park