

The players were initially disappointed by only travelling to Gt Missenden LTC to represent Bucks Tennis in the inaugural under 11 County Cup competition. However they soon realized they were so lucky to be playing at a first class venue which has a great variety of courts, large relaxing Clubhouse with fully staffed kitchen!

The opposition were some old rivals dictated by Covid (the LTA grouped Counties by distance to travel) Berkshire, Oxon. Gloucestershire and South Wales.

Our team who had been training together, some for years, in ranking order: Nicholas Morrell, Mohan Mehta, Dillon Ranauta, Oliver Osborne, Hugo Bailey and Oliver Westbrook. These players come from the following Clubs: Beaconsfield, Bisham Abbey, Chesham Bois, Stony Stratford, and Halton.

Our first match was against Oxon who we comfortably beat 5-1. Oliver Osborne's opponent who also trains at Halton Andrew Dunn, played his best ever match with hardly any unforced errors. Oliver played well in the doubles and spent time on the practice court while the rest of the team competed against Gloucestershire. In our six matches we only lost 4 games. The Fast4 scoring format (two sets up to 4 games with sudden death deuce followed by match tie-break third set) meant matches were finished very quickly.



I was disappointed to be persuaded to play another round of singles against our strongest opposition South Wales (this was scheduled to be played on Sunday); however our team responded positively with excellent fighting performances all round. Oliver Westbrook at number 4 was shocked to lose the 1<sup>st</sup> set against Martin Gil-Rueda 0-4. He managed to re-set and turn the match round with positive mentality, better depth and consistency storming through 2<sup>nd</sup> set tie-break 7-1. The match tie-break was very tight but with Martin's more attacking play proving too good. Our number 3 Dillon put on his best singles performance of the week-end and kept fighting back to take the second set to a tie-break but the impressive stroke-play by Jacob and slight loss of concentration meant South Wales took a 2-0 match lead. We were desperate to win a singles to take the match outcome into the doubles on Sunday. Mohan Mehta always gives 100% and against Kevin Huang (no 4 in national rankings) he did not disappoint. Despite losing the first set 0-4 Mohan re-grouped and fought back on the synthetic clay to lead 2-1 and saved match points at 2-3 forcing a tie-break where he again saved two match points with the help of the eagle-eyed court supervisor to win it 9-7. The match tie-break was truly exciting with both sets of supporters bellowing encouragement. Mohan again saved two match points but finally succumbed 7-10. Nick Morrell is such a natural player and uses his left-handed play very effectively looking to attack at all opportunities. However his opponent the national number 1 Niall Pickerd-Barua hit with tremendous fluidity and power. Nick realized after the match he had gone for too big a shot too early in the rallies probably showing too much respect to his opponent. So after 12 hours at Gt Missenden we drove home with mixed feelings....however you learn most when you lose.

On Sunday a demanding 9am start meant 8am preparation. We beat Berkshire 6-0 in a much closer match. Hugo Bailey who had unfortunately been ineligible the day before made his Bucks debut and ended up being undefeated at the end of the day. Notably Oliver Osborne performed so well against a very consistent opponent. He received rapturous applause on the show-court while using his all-court play to good effect. The whole team were pleased he won 4-3 4-2. He teamed up with Oliver Westbrook to win their doubles against the Berks 1<sup>st</sup> pair and again played very well to win 4-1 4-2. The highlight of this match was Ollie Westbrook rallying cross-court, losing and picking up his racket, sprinting to a short ball and hitting a glorious winner down the line (see FB post and video). Nick and Mohan overpowered their opponents.

The doubles against South Wales highlighted Bucks superior court positioning and movement. Nick and Mohan perform very well together but were out hit 2-4 2-4. Hugo and Dillon had great support in their emotionally charged match finally winning 2-4 4-3 10-5 leaving a stunned South Wales speechless and Bucks Tennis supporters clamoring for more.

**It was a pleasure to captain this team of very talented players who clearly love tennis.** The team spirit was tremendous, if not on the practice court they were on their mobiles playing games or supporting each other. They all had very supportive parents which really helped me and the Referee Yusuf.

**The Bucks Tennis Family is in great shape! We look forward to seeing their progress over the next few years.**