

WHERE DOES BOXING'S FUTURE LIE?
Brain Injury Association speak out on page 3



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**Real tennis
revealed** page 5

**Terrors closing in
on title** page 6

FREE



Girls rugby catching on

International rugby star Leanne Riley on page 2

Quins driving for Super Rugby success



DRIVING ON: Leanne Riley (Picture and below left) has high hopes for next season

CREDIT: Getty Images for Harlequins

By Jackson Cole

THREE years after England Women's Rugby World Cup triumph, the women's game has risen to the next level with the announcement of the new Women's Super Rugby league.

Harlequins Ladies were announced last month as one of the ten teams in the Rugby Football Union's multi-million pound investment plan.

The RFU's director of professional rugby, Nigel Melville, said at the launch that the competition, starting in September, represented a great opportunity for the women's game in driving standards both domestically and at an elite level.

Harlequins are also working at a grassroots level after launching their Switch programme in September, designed to create a pathway for girls wanting to get into rugby.

Harlequins are currently paired with Kent-based Aylesford Bulls, who lie third in the Women's Premiership, and the Bulls will play under the Harlequins name when the super league begins.

Jim Eyre, commercial operations director at Harlequins, thinks this is just the beginning.

"We set ourselves a standard of not being in the bottom three," he said.

"Aylesford are currently sitting third in the Premiership and

so our aspiration is to be the best ladies team in Europe."

The Switch initiative has coached up to 600 girls and Eyre was quick to praise the programme's popularity as well as the standard of coaching and positive results it has produced.

He said: "We have been slightly overwhelmed by the positive reaction and having gone to some of the local tournaments, where the girls play Switch, they just out-performed everyone else.

"It's really good to watch because it's not about physicality; it's more about skills and teamwork. It's nice to get something right for a change."

England international Leanne Riley is Harlequins' ambassador

for the Switch programme. The scrum-half, who has nine England appearances to her name, has also helped out with some training sessions.

"On one occasion there were 30 or more girls involved and at school level that is massive," Riley said.

"I never had that opportunity at school level to see what they have and how much they have learnt in that short space of time. "It's really good to see and a real breath of fresh air to see how much they are enjoying it."

Harlequins will take on fellow south west London club Richmond FC in the league and Riley admitted her excitement and hopes about the upcoming super league campaign.

She added: "There are a few new teams that we haven't played against.

"However, I like to think we will be targeting the top two as we're currently sitting third.

"For a new team, which has just formed a new partnership with Aylesford, this has certainly exceeded expectations."

The Switch programme has operated in four Richmond schools: Sir Richard Reynolds Catholic College, Grey Court School, Orleans Park School and Waldergrave School for Girls.

The initiative is also working with Tiffin School in Kingston and there are proposals to branch the programme out to Hounslow.

Head coach of the Switch programme Brian Holland, who has

been at Harlequins for more than ten years, hailed Riley as a fantastic role model for the up and coming Switch participants.

He also believes the new super league has breathed new life into girl's rugby and the Switch programme as a whole.

Holland said: "It gives drive and it also gives parents an idea of what their daughters could be doing with Harlequins so the whole women's picture is growing from grassroots up.

"The growth and demand of the game is huge. I think the aims of the Switch programme is to break down the barriers and get these young people thinking about the sport and once they have been broken it can only go from strength to strength."

5 Women's sport cash boosts

1. Midland Boxing Club, where Carl Frampton started out, was one of four clubs to receive £200,000 from Stormont to attract more women and girls to the sport in 2016.
2. In December 2016 it was announced that England's women cricketers were going to be awarded new two-year contracts designed to bring about greater security.
3. On March 13, 2017 the Football Association announced a plan to double the number of female players by 2020 following a separate £3.7m boost at grassroots level in 2015.
4. A 2014 sponsorship deal for the Women's Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race meant rowers would no longer have to raise money themselves to fund training and kit.
5. A £300,000 scheme was set up to increase women's sport involvement in Scotland in July 2016. Data showed 51% of young teenage girls, and 71% of boys, were active in sport.



SWITCH THE PLAY: The programme in action.

Credit: Vicki Sharp Photography

5 Brain injuries in sport

1. **Boxing** - Michael Watson's career ended in 1991 following a fight with Chris Eubank that left him with near-fatal brain injuries. The fight almost ended his life and he spent years trying to walk, read and write again.
2. **F1** - Jules Bianchi died in July 2015 after suffering a severe brain injury in the Japanese Grand Prix in 2014. He lost control of his car and crashed into a recovery vehicle that left him in an induced coma until his death.
3. **NFL** - Junior Seau committed suicide in 2012 after a horrible decline due to chronic traumatic encephalopathy. The impact of collisions in the NFL lead to his decline with a number of deceased former players found to have CTE.
4. **Rugby League** - Huddersfield Giants youngster Ronan Costello died in June 2016 after suffering a severe traumatic brain injury. The 17-year-old slipped in a tackle and hit his head on the ground in a tragic accident.
5. **Football** - Petr Cech suffered a depressed skull fracture in October 2006 while playing for Chelsea against Reading. The goalkeeper was involved in a nasty collision with Stephen Hunt that left his life hanging in the balance.



RINGSIDE: Fans gather prior to a fight at York Hall

Below: Nick Blackwell moments before collapsing

The boxing brain-teaser: Should fighting be legal?

By Daniel Blackham

IT'S the age old question that won't go away. Just how can a sport where the human brain rattles around the skull for 36 minutes be legal?

For many fighters, waking up at the crack of dawn, running for miles on end, draining their bodies, sacrificing nights out and social time with friends and family, boxing stopped being a choice a long time ago.

Fighters get into the ring for entertainment, to please a crowd of hundreds or thousands of customers, the public paying for blood. For some in that crowd, watching two men in the ring beating each other is just a sweet release from normality.

We've all seen the dark times of boxing, the McClellan, Watson, Blackwell and Martin incidents, where lives have almost been lost due to fighting, could it be time to ring the final bell on the squared circle combat?

Peter McCabe, chief executive of Headway - the brain injury association, said: "The simple reality is that every time a boxer steps into the ring, they run the risk of suffering a fatal injury or sustaining a lifelong disability as a result of brain trauma.

"These risks are heightened for boxers who have previously

sustained brain injuries or who are on the road to recovering from concussion."

When asked about optimal rest periods in boxing, Mr McCabe said: "Ultimately however, the dangers of boxing are significant and unacceptable for all fighters - no matter the duration since their last bout.

"The medical evidence, supported by the British Medical Association and numerous other medical bodies across the world is clear and beyond doubt.

"In addition to the risk of suffering an acute bleed or bruising to the brain, which can be fatal, the cumulative effects of repeated blows to the head can lead to long-term, life changing injury."

The real kicker came when Mr McCabe declared: "Put simply, there is no safe form of boxing and it should be banned."

Last January at the Copper Box, Tommy Martin, the youngest ever English lightweight champion, was forced to quit the sport, and abandon the craft he had honed since he was 11 years old.

For people like Martin, boxing consumed his life, and was impossible to shake.

In a routine defence of his English Super-Lightweight title, Martin was stopped by John Wayne Hibbert, he lost his belt, and almost his life.

Martin refused to let his defeat get the best of him, and

has now turned to coaching.

Martin explained that, though from the outside boxing may be brutal, if you delve deeper, you'll see the true beauty of the sport.

"Boxing is mad, it's like a little family, everyone gets together and looks out for one another and it was nice to see how much love I got for trying to stay in the game after everything that's happened," he added.

"When they said to me, the neurosurgeon said he didn't like boxing, it was hard to hear, it was all I knew, without boxing in the world I wouldn't know what to do. "I wouldn't know what to be a part of, so I think there are a lot of worse things out there.

"If it wasn't for boxing there would be a lot more kids on the street, more kids doing a lot more harmful things to their bodies, there would be a lot more deaths if there was no boxing.

"With boxing, it was my world, it's all I know, it was my first love.

"To be honest with you, it split me and my fiancée up at the time, it was hard but I had to put boxing first and I gave up everything for my dream, so to have it all be taken away from me, it killed me inside.

"It was just a life changer, it's really spun the whole world on it's head for me.

"It winds me up when I see fighters going out partying, it makes me think you don't realise

the opportunity you've got.

"I can't stand it when I see fighters just playing in there, because you can't play boxing."

Liam Cameron, who will fight Fedor Chudinov next month, explained that to many, boxing is more than just a way of making a living, and boxers know the risks.

"You can't say boxing is safe to be fair," said Cameron.

"If you learn the art good enough, you still can't get in the shower without getting wet, but if you learn your craft good, and you also have a good defence, you're still going to get hit a bit, but look how it's changed people's lives.

"Some people are millionaires, some people have bought their house with it, and it's got people off the streets.

"I know it's not good for your health, definitely not, they're probably telling the truth."

The questions of how ethical boxing is, how safe it is, whether safety can be improved upon or whether it should be scrapped will never go away.

A sport and a discipline this brutal may never be described as being 'beautiful', and there will always be naysayers, however the steps that have been taken from within the sport to prevent incidents like that of the Copper Box last January, are a confident sign that the 'sweet science' could one day become just that.





KICK OFF: Former Real Madrid striker Emilio Butragueño launches the club's new partnership with Croydon's Cedars School



FUTURE: The Social Sports School scheme targets social integration and education in disadvantaged children

Real Madrid link-up for young Croydon footballers

By Andrew Gerlis

MY TRAM had just left Wimbledon station on Wednesday when the news of a terror attack outside the Houses of Parliament filtered through on Twitter.

I was on my way to Croydon for the launch of the Real Madrid Foundation and The Cedars School's Social Sports initiative - the first UK-based project of its kind, aimed at using sport to aid integration for children at risk of social or economic exclusion.

Information from Westminster emerged throughout the duration of my journey and stayed in the air as I walked in to the Grade II listed building, built as a house in 1761 and opened as The Cedars School in 2013.

The launch began with a mention of the situation unfolding in the centre of the capital and an offer of thoughts and prayers to those affected. If there was ever a time for a message of inclusion and support, it was now.

"The most exciting aspect of the project for me is that it is not just about teaching football skills, but about preparing young people for life," said the headmaster of Cedars School, Robert Teague.

"Social Sports School is a committee project; it's not a hot house for elite players or a scouting operation. "In other words it's not about looking for greatness, but it's about helping to produce greatness and to affect real change in people's lives."

Football has long been seen as a way of bringing people together, regardless of colour or creed, from the 1914 Christmas truce match to the Real Madrid Foundation's initiatives, currently being used by 50,000 people in almost 75 countries.

At The Cedars School, Real Madrid's former 123-goal striker, current director of institutional relations and patron for multiple charities, Emilio Butragueño, spoke of the power of football as a social tool.

"It is great that this unique sport can be used not just to make millions of people happy

all over the world but, at the same time, to help so many children on this planet," he said.

"We really believe that sport is a vehicle for social integration and personal development."

The initiative is running in partnership with Croydon's Kinetic Foundation, set up in the wake of the 2011 London riots to offer educational services and opportunities for disadvantaged children in south London, and Football for Unity.

Football for Unity is a west London-based programme dedicated to creating sustainable sports projects around the world that provide a platform to promote cultural exchange and healthy lifestyles among young people.

"The hope is that we can improve integration through sports," said Natasha Mudhar, spokesperson for the charity.

"Football for Unity basically helps promote unity and that notion of togetherness of all communities, irrespective of colour, nationality and gender.

"It helps to spread that message of community that we all really need at the moment."

London Mayor Sadiq Khan was due to speak at the launch but, due to the tragedy developing in the centre of his city, was forced to pull out at the last minute.

In his absence Cllr Alisa Flemming from Croydon Council remained as the only political representative on the panel, and her views on the subject of football as a tool for integration from a local level spoke volumes.

She said: "Offering young people these activities, I don't think it can be underestimated.

"Often we look at what sport can do and try to pigeonhole it.

"But if we're looking at issues around tackling mental health within the borough, and the problems for some of our teenagers and younger children, we can see the difference that it can make in terms of encouraging and lifting self-esteem."

Nobody is pulling the wool over anyone's eyes - football as a whole does have a darker side with fan trouble, corruption and cheating generating more publicity and debate than positive schemes.

Even away from football the press is seemingly dominated by bad news from both sides of the Atlantic and stories like the one coming out of Croydon can often become buried.

But there is hope that, with the education, values and strong sense of professionalism Social Sports Schools initiatives instill in children, the next generation can have a positive global effect.

In times like these it is important not to let the good in the world be overlooked, and a message of togetherness, hope and a better future for every child rang true throughout the speeches at the school.

"In getting this project to this point, there's one thing that has struck me," said Matthew Sherwood, CEO of the PACT Educational Trust - owners of The Cedars School.

"Despite the diverse backgrounds, all of the organisations involved have one over-arching goal - to provide children with the values and skills they need for life and to become the men and women our society needs."

With initiatives like Cedar School's, London's future is bright.



PARTNERSHIP: Cedars School headteacher Robert Teague looks on as Emilio Butragueño highlights the importance of these schemes

5 who were saved by football



Raheem Sterling (Man City) : As a child Sterling lived with up to eight relatives in a bungalow in the dangerous Mauerley, one of Kingston, Jamaica's most dangerous slums. Sterling left for London with his mother but in 2004 had the devastating news that his father had died back in Kingston. In London, Sterling spent three years at a special behaviour school in Brent and was told by a teacher he would end up in prison or play for England. It was amazing foresight.



Steven Pienaar (Sunderland) : The South African grew up in a township in Johannesburg described as a 'death zone to keep the devil busy'. It was so dangerous Pienaar was not allowed to sit on the sofa in his home for fear of being struck by a stray bullet. He escaped the surroundings signing for Ajax Cape Town 800 miles away.



Fabrice Muamba: Growing up in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Muamba witnessed a brutal civil war before his family fled to England as political refugees. The Arsenal youth, who retired from football after he almost died from a heart attack whilst playing for Bolton, lost his uncle, friends and neighbours in the war. Muamba could not speak a word of English when he arrived in London but signed for Arsenal at 14 and made his debut at 17.



Dele Alli (Tottenham) : At the start of the 2016/17 season, Alli switched his shirt name to Dele after feeling no connection to his surname. Alli's father left home for the USA a week after he was born and due to a troubled home with an alcoholic mother, the England international moved in with the family of an MK Dons scholar at 13.



Dejan Lovren (Liverpool) : Born in Zenica in what is now Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lovren and his family fled to Germany from his home town in 1992, 12 months before 15 people were massacred when its market was bombed. Lovren and his family were ordered to leave Germany for Croatia where he signed for Dinamo Zagreb as a youth.

5 Real tennis facts

1. Real tennis is played on an indoor court which is enclosed by four irregularly-sized walls. Around three sides of the court are the sloping roofs of the penthouse which also form part of the playing area.
2. All courts are unique. Every feature of the court has its own role to play in defining the structure of the game. The net divides the court and, unlike tennis, the service is always delivered at the same end of the court.
3. The balls are handmade and much harder than those used in lawn tennis. They are made of cork and weigh around 75 grams. Balls take roughly 35 minutes to make and a set consisting of 60-70 balls usually lasts two weeks.
4. The rackets are all asymmetrical, they look wonky as they are designed in the shape of a hand to make it easier for players to take the ball closer to the ground. The design of the racket has changed little in five centuries.
5. There are nearly 40 types of serve including the giraffe, the hunting dog and the bobble. Points can be scored by hitting nets around the court including the grille, the winning gallery, which rings a bell, or the dedans.



GAME TIME: Players in action at The Queen's Club in London
 BELOW: A modern real tennis racket
 BELOW LEFT: The vintage machine real tennis balls are made on

Real tennis revealed: The father of racket sports

By Marina Stephens

BRITISH people call it *real tennis*, Americans refer to it as *court tennis*, for Australians it is *royal tennis* and if you are French you know it as *jeu de palm*.

Real tennis is a relatively niche sport but its popularity is rising.

Players describe the sport as a mixture of lawn tennis and chess because tactics are everything.

Real tennis has always had a smaller sporting community compared to many other sports.

Just 7000 people around the world play it but it is very much a growth sport.

There are only 47 real tennis courts in use across the world, over half of which are in the United Kingdom.

New courts open roughly every five years, although there was a boom in the 1990s when six were built. The latest court was built in 2016 at Wellington College, Berkshire, which cost more than £1.5million.

Real tennis is a fascinating sport which is fast and requires a huge amount of skill and clever

ball control. It may appear complex at first but beginners shouldn't be alarmed - the rules are just slightly more complicated than lawn tennis.

What attracts people to play real tennis is its challenging aspect. This is where the chess reference comes into play: the structure of the game emphasises tactical awareness rather than speed and power.

Ben Ronaldson, head of real tennis at The Queen's Club based in Barons Court, London, revealed what makes it the successful sport it is.

He said: "The best thing about real tennis is that you will never stop learning. There is a lot of mileage in trying to work out how to beat your opponent. There are so many different angles and spins you need to get used to compared to other sports."

Real tennis is the ancestor of all racket sports and it is this historical pedigree of the sport, which dates back to the 16th century that people enjoy and appreciate. King Henry VIII used to play on his court in Hampton Court Palace.

Lawn tennis was one of the racket sports that derived from real tennis many years ago.

To keep the sport's popularity increasing it is crucial to introduce it into schools so as many young players as possible can get the chance to have a go and see what the sport is all about.

The Queen's Club welcome schools to their club to have a go at real tennis and encourage children to begin lessons.

Ronaldson said: "Just in the last three weeks we have managed to get two local state schools coming along and they now play every Thursday and Friday which is fantastic."

"We love introducing the sport to any keen and willing players."

Charlie Stevens, a 20-year-old student, is an enthusiastic and regular real tennis player who got the chance to learn at school and he has reaped the rewards.

He said: "I took it up at school and I've now been playing for over five years."

"It is a brilliant game because you can be a lot fitter, faster and younger than your opponent but that doesn't necessarily mean you are going to win because the game requires a lot more thought than that."

"It is not about who hits the ball the hardest, it's about positioning and where you place the ball. It provides me with more of a challenge than lawn tennis."

"The game requires honesty, it is essential to the sport. You have to trust your opponent."

Real tennis has a great sporting community with an online internationally run system where players can keep in contact with each other.

That system allows people to view players' records and handicaps and has been a welcome addition to the sport's community spirit across the world.

Ben Bomford, an experienced real tennis player and head of rackets at The Queen's Club, added: "With there being only 7000 active players, everyone is friends. We all try and scratch each other's backs."

"One challenge players like to undertake is to try and complete the check list. This is where you attempt to play on every real tennis court around the world and as there are only 47 courts in total it is possible."





UNBEATABLE: Celebrating yet another goal

BELOW: The Terrors celebrate last season's London Senior Cup win (left) and Billy Dunn in action (right)

CREDIT: Sam Conquest

By Will Holderness

LOOKING down from the Premier League to the Ryman South is enough to stir an acrophobic reaction in any football fan.

Such is the vast gap between wealth and grassroots that it makes it all too easy to turn a blind eye to the achievements that occur way down in the eighth tier of English football.

Cast an eye into the Ryman South and there you will catch a glimpse of a side who are taking both 2017 and the league by storm.

Traverse up and down the country, across all professional leagues, and you won't find a goal scoring record that tops that of Tooting & Mitcham United Football Club.

Under the guidance of Frank Wilson, the Terrors have instilled fear among opposition defences with a massive 115 league goals so far this campaign – the highest tally from non-league step four and up.

'Goals win you games' may smack of another state-the-obvious Michael Owen cliché but this part of the game has been the key behind their record-breaking season.

So far this calendar year, Wilson's side have set a club record by winning all 14 league games which is quite some feat considering they only managed 16 the whole of last season and

the manager believes the main difference is the recruits brought into the squad.

"Our goal scoring record is testament to the players we've brought in and particularly those acquired in attacking areas," said the 30-year-old.

"A style of football that I like to play is being expressive in possession and we've selected players that can offer different assets and attributes in attacking areas so we can play with a very attacking style.

"We have players that score a lot of goals but we're not type-casted to scoring goals in centre-forward positions because we've had players chipping in from other areas on the field and that's exactly what you

need to be successful as a football team."

Since the club offered their reserve team coach the managerial role in the 2015/16 season, Wilson brought instant success to Imperial Fields by winning the London Senior Cup.

His appointment, bringing a fresh enthusiasm, style of play and ambition to the Terrors, is paying dividends seeing as one look at the table shows Tooting & Mitcham sitting nine points clear at the top of Ryman South.

"We're in a great position at the moment," added Wilson.

"We've got to keep getting maximum points and we'd all like to see that extend as far as it can possibly go so our ambitions are to win every single game."

There seems to be no bounds to Wilson's ambition for the club, one that is shared by the chairman and staff who have worked together to instil a philosophy that is producing results at the business end of the season.

Wilson said: "The chairman's got big ambitions, the club's got the infrastructure to go on and step up the divisions in non-league football – it really has no limits in that sense.

"The staff here at Tooting – my first team coach Paul Dale, assistant coach Ashley Bosah, fitness coach Terry Angel and physio Mohini Morar plus all the people that volunteer – these are people that work day and night, sweat black and white to work as hard as they can for the football club."

One player who has benefited from the club's togetherness is top scorer Billy Dunn.

The forward is enjoying his most prolific season with 26 league goals and has fallen back in love with football since joining Tooting & Mitcham.

"I've never been a part of a team that's had such a good team spirit," said Dunn.

"Dale is the best coach I've ever had and he works really well with Frank.

"I haven't had this much fun in years, I'm much hungrier to score and I'm playing with a smile on my face."

Their next home game on 1st April against South Park will be free admission for all for an events day to promote the club.

5 Terrors to make it to top level

1. Michail Antonio - the winger scored on his debut aged 17 and had prolific Championship spells, before impressive form for West Ham earned an England call up.
2. Paddy Hasty - starting out at Tooting & Mitcham, the big striker went on to play for Leyton Orient and QPR, and represented Great Britain at the 1960 Olympics in Rome.
3. Nathan Ellington - he only played once before moving to Bristol Rovers and his strike partnership with Jason Roberts was instrumental in Wigan's promotion in 2005.
4. Dario Gradi - he only played briefly at amateur level before deciding to move into coaching and was in charge of Crewe Alexandra for 26 years over three spells.
5. Alex Stepney - the Mitcham-born goalkeeper started at the Terrors, before moving on and being part of the first English team to win the European Cup at Manchester United.



Teddington looking for 15 in a row to seal title in style



CHAMPIONS?: Chris Seddon leads the charge

PICTURE: Chris Seddon

By Rob Godmon

SOMETHING is stirring in a leafy corner of south west London.

Teddington Hockey Club's first team, the oldest hockey club in the world, are making new history this season.

They are on an incredible winning run of 14 matches that has taken them to the brink of the Men's Hockey League Conference East title with one game to go.

Team coach Chris Seddon is clear on why the team has been so successful.

He said: "One of the things that's really important is that you have a group of guys that really get on well with each other but also work well with each other."

"We want to play attractive hockey so we shift the ball really quickly and try and score as many goals as possible."

"We focus on ourselves rather than the teams we're facing and we use fast counter attacks, trying to get the ball up

to our forwards which everyone has really bought into.

"This has really helped us on the pitch and everyone knows what their role is and we have a clear plan."

"We always focus on what we're doing rather than the opposition."

Teddington have been unable, however, to shake off nearest challengers Sevenoaks, with the two sides level on points going into a dramatic final meeting between the two on Sunday.

They need a draw to secure the title and a place in the promotion play-offs for a chance to play in the Premier Division next season in a match manager Paul Oliver has described as something of a 'cup final.'

Oliver has claimed there is no prospect of adopting a more cautious style despite his side needing just a point from the crucial encounter.

He said: "I expect it to be a high

scoring game, obviously we can draw, but you can't go into any hockey match thinking you can draw the game, that just doesn't happen in hockey."

"There is no prospect of us just trying to avoid defeat. The only time it might come into play is if we're a goal up with five minutes to go."

"But in our starting plans for the game we don't take that into account at all. You just can't do it."

Teddington actually started the season shakily, with two defeats from their opening three games.

It was only after they got key players like double Olympians Matt Daly and Alistair Wilson and Australian Nick Johnson out on to the pitch that the team started to click.

And they truly have clicked in quite spectacular fashion.

Since a 7-2 hammering of Oxted in their fourth game, they have been the

top scorers in all of the top four divisions of English hockey with 73 goals.

As Seddon said: "We've got Tim Davenport who's the top scorer in the National League and we've got Matt Daly who's the third or fourth highest scorer of all time."

"There's also Andy Pett who has got 15 league goals a season for the last 10 years, so we've got plenty of firepower."

"All we need to do is send out the goal scorers onto the pitch and it really works for us."

Both manager and coach are united in agreement as to the standout moment of their impressive season, a hard-fought 3-2 victory away to Cambridge.

Seddon said: "We played really awfully but dug out the result, at one stage we were down to nine men."

"We defended the whole game which is really unlike us so it was nice to see a different side of us."

Oliver added: "We know when we're at our best we can be good but it's winning when you're not at your best which is the problem."

There is belief coursing through the squad, shown by the fact that they have come back from two goals down in two of their past three games.

Their results are proving inspirational to the club as a whole.

Suzy Ford, Ladies first team player, said: "The men's success this season has inspired the whole of the club. As a junior coach I have recently seen them be more excited about hockey."

"The men's firsts have become fantastic role models for them."

If Teddington win the league, they will meet the Conference North and West winners in a play-off to join English hockey's elite.

But as Oliver himself said: "One cup final at a time."

5 best win streaks

1. **CRICKET** - Steve Waugh's legendary Australia team with Glenn McGrath, Jason Gillespie, Ricky Ponting and Mark Waugh won 16 Test matches on the trot before losing to India at the Eden Gardens in an epic contest.
2. **BASEBALL** - American sport's quintessential maverick Joe DiMaggio holds a stunning record. He has the most consecutive games with a minimum base hit since 1941 after he went 56 games in a row, it has not been broken yet.
3. **TENNIS** - Arguably the greatest tennis player of all time, Roger Federer was invincible on grass for half a decade and 65 matches until his streak was brought to a halt by his nemesis Rafael Nadal in the 2008 Wimbledon final.
4. **NFL** - The 2003-04 season was an unprecedented one for the NFL and the New England Patriots as they notched up 21 straight wins (including playoffs). Led by Tom Brady, the Pats also won Super Bowl XXXVIII that year.
5. **FOOTBALL** - Arsene Wenger's champion team of the early 2000s, featuring Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp, was nearly unplayable. Not only did it win the 2001-02 Premier League title, the team notched up 14 straight wins in 2002.

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5 Surrey cricket facts

1. Surrey were the team of the fifties winning seven consecutive County Championships from 1952–1958 and also sharing the 1950 title with Lancashire. They only won one title in the following 40 years in 1971.
2. Sir Jack Hobbs is arguably Surrey's greatest ever player. He is still the leading run scorer and century maker in first class cricket. He fell one century short of 200 with a record 199 centuries and hit 61,670 first class runs.
3. Percy Fender was one of Surrey's early stars and an early recipient of Wisden's Player of the Year in 1914. He set a 35-minute world record for the fastest century in 1920, later equalled by Steve O'Shaughnessy in 1983.
4. Alec Stewart is Surrey's most capped England player with 133 Test appearances and the second most capped of all time behind another former captain Alastair Cook. He is now the director of cricket at Surrey.
5. The Oval has been the home of Surrey CCC since it formed in 1845. It was first used for a Test match on 6 September 1880 played between England and Australia. It is currently known as the Kia Oval.



FULL HOUSE: A packed crowd enjoys a test match between England and India at the Kia Oval. CREDIT: Surrey.CC

Sangakkara can help Surrey to County title

By George Dabby

SURREY County Cricket Club are on the up.

It was only 2013 when the club were relegated from Division One of the County Championship, a year after the tragic death of batsman Tom Maynard.

After returning to Division One in 2016 there is a feeling of optimism around the Oval, aided by the presence of experienced internationals, including Sri Lanka legend Kumar Sangakkara, who has re-signed for the 2017 season.

After retiring from the international game in 2015 as one of the greatest batsmen of all time, Sangakkara enjoyed a prolific 2016 with Surrey where he scored over 1000 runs in his first season.

For batsman Arun Harinath, a player Sangakkara suggested should play for Sri Lanka, his experience is invaluable both on and off the field.

Sangakkara tweeted last year that Harinath could still qualify to play for Sri Lanka and Harinath praised the influence he has had on the club.

He said: "It's great seeing him there at the other end when you're out there batting, he brings a cool head."

"I think it's his judgement that sets him apart, he knows how to approach every match situation."

Sangakkara's influence is clearly rubbing off well on Harinath, who scored a half-century in Surrey's final game of the season and is optimistic ahead of the new campaign, including his own chances of appearing in Surrey's one-day sides.

"Going away for the winter to work with Gary Kirsten was great, he's a fantastic coach and it's a great experience playing outside England," said Harinath.

"My focus, first and foremost, is performing well for Surrey."

"I think that I've got the skill set to perform for Surrey in all forms of the game."

He will face stiff competition from the likes of Kevin Pietersen, who recently confirmed he will be available in Surrey's Natwest T20 Blast campaign ahead of an exciting summer at the Oval.

The famous south London ground will also host the final of the 2017 Champions Trophy in which the major cricketing nations will converge on England for the bi-annual tournament.

There are also a number of group stage games at the Oval which All Out Cricket deputy editor Jo Harman believes will produce fireworks.

He said: "The final, to be played at the Oval on June 18, should be a great occasion but looking at the group matches the one that particularly stands out is India v South Africa."

"Both sides have formidable batting line-ups who consistently post scores in excess of 350 and in Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers, team mates at Indian Premier League outfit Royal Challengers Bangalore, you've got the two most complete limited-overs batsmen in the world going head-to-head."

"They each have all the shots in the book, and plenty that aren't, and a huge appetite for the big occasion. A match-up not to be missed."

The Oval has recently undergone redevelopments to increase capacity in the New Peter May Stand, which Harman believes will enhance the ground's atmosphere.

He said: "Lord's has an aura and history unmatched by any other cricket ground in the world but for one-day tournaments such as the Champions Trophy there's no beating the Oval."

"It's loud and raucous, not to mention very boozy, and it all adds up to create an unforgettable atmosphere."

"As a spectator you feel close to the action and the New Peter May Stand, which has increased the ground's capacity to 25,300, has taken the ground up a notch."

Further good news for Surrey is the contract renewal of head coach Michael Di Venuto, who has signed a two-year extension to stay with the club until 2019.

The former Australian batsman, 42, has already helped Surrey reach the final of the 2016 One-Day Cup and will now look to push for the Division One title.

Cricket writer Richard Heller believes that in Di Venuto they have a coach who can help Surrey win a first title since 2002.

He said: "In previous generations Surrey had one of the most feared sides in the country."

"The sides of the late 1990s with Mark Butcher, Mark Ramprakash and Alec Stewart were exceptional and it has been tough for Surrey to adjust to life after these players."

"But they seem to have turned a corner now and in Sam Curran they have a wonderful young talent who will be key to their chances this year."

"An England call-up will not be far away for Curran but Surrey have a good chance of building a strong unit this year."

"This will be one of the tightest races in recent years as Middlesex's triumph last season brought an end to Yorkshire's dominance in the County Championship."

"Surrey have always attracted great internationals in recent years into their sides like Graeme Smith but in Sangakkara they have a true great of the modern game."

Surrey's County Championship campaign begins against Kent on April 7.



BIG HIT: Sri Lanka legend Kumar Sangakkara has re-signed for Surrey as they chase a first Division One title since 2002.

CREDIT: Flickr



New age of hockey moves to airwaves

SLAP HAPPY: The fun that Amy Gibson has while recording is clear for all to hear

Below: Gibson was a part of the Great Britain team in the lead up to Rio
 PICTURE: @AmyGibson_29

By Will Moulton

IN an age of digital revolution, with a public constantly driven by an incessant thirst for new knowledge at the touch of a button, hockey could not have timed its ascent to the forefront of British sport any better.

The rise in the popularity of the game since that glorious golden evening in Rio has been nothing short of meteoric.

Such is the demand for hockey in this country that a dedicated weekly print publication - The Hockey Paper - was created in late 2016 and now the sport has a new podcast, the superbly named Slap Chat.

The brainchild of Scotland player Amy Gibson, the project was born back in January and has already proved to be a huge hit among the hockey fraternity, the opening episodes having been listened to more than 3,500 times on SoundCloud alone.

For Gibson, hosting Slap Chat provides her with an opportunity to share her passion for the game and help give her sport the level of coverage she believes it deserves, although her initial inspiration was fairly unique.

The Reading goalkeeper explained: "I was listening to 'My Dad Wrote A Porno' and thought it was hilarious, two pals reading this book and having a bit of a laugh with people listening - it was cool that you can have a

laugh and that's the sort of thing I am trying to go for.

"I love hockey and I want everyone to hear about it - it's not out there in the media as much as other sports so I really want to try and engage with people.

"With the women's World Cup coming to England in 2018 and the men's Hockey World League this summer it's a good time for hockey, especially after last summer's Olympics."

Listen to any episode and it immediately becomes clear that Gibson has already achieved her goal of making Slap Chat an enjoyable listen, with laughs and jokes aplenty throughout.

The close bond she has with each co-presenter also becomes immediately apparent for all those who listen, especially with fellow Scot and Wimbledon player Mairi Drummond, the two having known and played with each other for many years on the international stage.

The midfielder said: "I just find the whole thing really funny, Gibson coming to Putney or me going to Reading and recording it - we just have such a great laugh and so much fun behind the microphone.

"There must be so much stuff that she has to cut out because we're laughing and it's just good fun having banter about hockey.

"She's such a good mate as well so when she asked me I just said 'yes, sign me up, take me to fame and fortune!'"

For broadcaster Alison Mitchell, one of the country's leading cricket commentators, such natural presenter chemistry is crucial for podcasts to work.

"A large part of what makes audio easy to listen to for me is warmth and rapport between the people presenters who are doing the podcast," the co-host of the popular cricket podcast 'Stumped' said.

"You want to listen to people who are knowledgeable about their subject as you want to learn but you almost want to feel included in it as well - some of the best podcasts are those where you come away thinking you've had a great big hug."

While the signs are certainly encouraging, there is still much hockey has to do if it is to become ingrained as one of the main sports in this nation, with interest in the domestic game still so low that the BBC and Sky Sports are yet to dedicate pages on their website to it, still just choosing to classify it as just an 'Olympic Sport.'

This is something Drummond in particular still cannot get her head around, struggling to fathom how so few people could be interested in such a fast-paced and highly skilled game.

The 24-year-old said: "I've always been surprised by how little coverage hockey actually gets. I'm obviously biased because I play but I think it's such a good spectator sport.

"Obviously things have picked up massively since the summer but before that it just amazed me that people didn't really want to watch it or hear about it, but now everyone loves it thanks to that evening in Rio. It's just a shame it had to take a gold medal for everyone to recognise that hockey is cool."

As for future installments of the podcast, Gibson will not be short of talking points across the upcoming months, with many international fixtures taking place on these shores following the conclusion of the domestic season, and has also set her sights on branching out into other echelons of social media.

This is an area where it is clear for all to see just how popular the

game has become, with a recent photo of Olympian Sophie Bray standing outside Buckingham Palace, beaming with pride after collecting her MBE from The Duke of Cambridge, attracting 1586 'likes' and 34 comments on her Instagram account. Another photo, posted almost exactly one year prior, received 129 'likes'.

"I tried doing some memes for my Facebook page but they went down like a lead balloon," said 27-year-old Gibson.

"But I think I will keep going with that and try and get people engaging with the social media accounts away from the podcast. Obviously I want people to listen to Slap Chat but it would be great if it could also start conversations on top of that."



5 British sport pods

1. **5 LIVE SPORT SPECIALS** - This BBC podcast showcases various one-off specials, with many in-depth interviews and coverage with some of the biggest names in sport.
2. **FIGHTING TALK** - Guests compete for points with their own sporting punditry in this hilarious look at the volatile world of sport. Comments can be awarded or penalised.
3. **FOOTBALL WEEKLY** - The Guardian's James Richardson leads topical yet humorous conversation on the various ins-and-outs from the ever-changing world of football.
4. **SKY CRICKET PODCAST** - Former England captain Nasser Hussain is joined by many current and retired cricketers to discuss all things related to cricket.
5. **RUGBY TONIGHT** - BT Sport's Lawrence Dallaglio and the rest of the rugby team draw upon their wealth of experience to provide detailed insight and analysis.