



EQUALITY FOR GIRLS' TENNIS IN GB

Position Statement

September 2009

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EQUALITY FOR GIRLS' TENNIS IN GB

INTRODUCTION

GB Tennis Girls is anxious that the LTA put girls' tennis on an equal footing with boys' tennis in accordance with the blueprint by providing equal funding and competitive opportunities. GBTG also questions the merits behind redefining "equal" in a position statement provided by the LTA.

The LTA's matrix system currently funds considerably less girls than boys, and while for the most part competitive opportunities are equal, this is not the case at the pinnacle event, the National Championships.

It is clear that the LTA are genuinely trying to help tennis but GBTG argue that these two LTA practices will not have the desired effect of producing more top 100 female players. By holding up the girls' side of the game to a disproportionately high and unequal standard the LTA are discouraging an already smaller base of females from playing, achieving more and having a good tennis experience to pass on.

ISSUE ONE: The size of the U16 and U18 national draws for girls

It seems the LTA solution to raising the standard of girls' tennis in GB is to limit the U16 national championship competition to only those U16 year olds who are U18 international level.

LTA position:

In defence of the different draw sizes it was quoted that for girls the national championships, "is aimed at players at U16 and U18 who are regularly competing in ITF international events of any grade and/or top level domestic competition."

The LTA also stated that the smaller draw size "reflects the significantly lower number of female players competing regularly at national level."

The LTA stated that ratings for boys and girls are not comparable.

And finally, the LTA used the number of U16 players competing in the U18 ITF events in the UK as a justification for the draw size of U16 and U18 nationals for girls.

GBTG accept that less girls than boys play tennis in the UK but would like the following contributing factors to be considered:

- The very age that the LTA cut down the national draw size for girls is the same age that all sports see a drop out in female participation.
- Nationals acceptance is a benchmark for any player and this reduction in draw size, where 32 less places are available for girls than boys, further encourages this drop out. After years of being accepted for nationals U10, U12, and U14 the girls then get rejected at U16 further fuelling de-motivation and drop out which perpetuates the trend into the U18s where again 32 less players are accepted.
- Competing internationally is expensive; GBTG estimate one week abroad costs the equivalent of some six tournaments in GB. Whilst this is the same for girls and boys, boys get more matrix funding (see issue 2) and competing internationally is not a pre-requisite for boys' national acceptance due to the more inclusive draw size.
- The more matrix funding opportunities for boys at all ages from when they start out on a full court with a yellow ball from 11 (see appendices A to E) until they are 23 years old makes it easier for boys to travel, to continue competing and therefore maintain strong numbers and interest throughout their junior careers. Suddenly at 15,16 and 17 girls get fewer places available in the national draw and find it harder to get funding.
- The smaller draw size for girls in 2009 meant that in the original 16s entry lists, higher rated girls (5.2) were not accepted where lower rated boys (6.1) who were. The ratings system is well established and is the same for both sexes with a player's rating being representative of the number of quality matches won. A player needs 7 wins against players of the same rating or higher with a 60% winning record. It is no easier for girls than boys to win such matches and therefore be higher and GBTG does not understand therefore how the ratings between sexes can be called incomparable.

- Even if it is accepted that the nationals should be an international level tournament GBTG believes the draw sizes should be equal because as table 1.1 shows:*

1. If every British girl with an U16 Tennis Europe ranking entered the U16 nationals, there would not be enough space for them all to play.

2. If every British girl with an U18 ITF ranking entered the U18 nationals, there would not be enough space for them all to play, and from the smaller base there are actually more girls than boys with an U18 ITF ranking.

*ITF junior rankings as of Sep 20th

Table 1.1

INTERNATIONAL RANKINGS OF U16 AND U18 BOYS AND GIRLS (Sep 2009)			
	U18 Boys with ITF ranking	U18 Girls with ITF ranking	National rejections for internationally ranked players if all entered
Holding a ranking	81	84	GIRLS: 36
top 50	0	3	BOYS: 17
top 100	4	4	
top 250	16	10	
	U16 Boys with ETA Ranking	U16 Girls with ETA ranking	
Holding a ranking	111	75	GIRLS: 27
top 50	7	0	BOYS: 31
top 100	12	1	
top 250	15	6	

- In response to the number of girls playing the U18 ITF events in Britain argument, GBTG would like it acknowledged that there were not byes in every girls' event as stated by the LTA. One of the events had a full qualifying draw (i.e. no byes) and there are other factors affecting British girls travelling to these events in addition to the reasons shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

FOUR ITF TOURNAMENTS IN UK 2009 USED AS BASIS FOR NATIONAL DRAW			
	Byes in girls	Other things affecting entry	
NOTTINGHAM 1	1 bye	12 G3s on around UK	
NOTTINGHAM 2	0 byes	School term time	
EDINBURGH 1	7 byes	School term time	Conflict with ladies 10K
EDINBURGH 2	16 byes	School term time	Conflict with ladies 10K

Other influencing factors affecting participation in these events:

- Girls who are getting rejected for National Championships, and those falling off the Matrix, are likely to assume that international events are out of their league.
- Not all girls have access to a support team with knowledge about the international junior tournaments, and many would not have even known about them. Our research shows that some 7.2 and 8.1 girls did not enter the U12 and U14 nationals as they thought they were only Grade 3 tournament standard even though they would have been accepted.
- The fact that three of these four U18 ITF events were staged during term time is also a massive factor. While the boys managed to fill them, there is a larger base to draw from in the first place and there are more boys playing full-time (outside of traditional school system) than girls.
- For the one ITF event which was in the school holidays, there were 12 Grade 3 domestic events held around the UK, something that U16 girls would naturally consider entering and if the events are not in your region, parents are likely to weigh up the cost of travelling when there is a local option with good competition and rankings points.

Surely the National Championships of Great Britain should be a **National event for both genders**. The best in the country play off for the title. Girls should not have to be at a higher standard to participate and the winner should come through an equal size draw. The best 48 or 64 girls and boys should play off to be the very best.

Restricting the entry does not ensure higher standards as many who were initially rejected held international rankings and the standard of the 20th - 60th ranked girls in the UK is not so disparate.

Issue 2 and 3: Development of Elite Junior and Senior Girls and Disproportionate Matrix Funding

LTA position:

The LTA has spent considerable time and resources analysing data based on the world's top 100 female players from some point in 2007. This data shows that to be on track for the WTA top 100 a player should have a high ITF U18 ranking when they are under 16 and state that this shows that girls mature on average two years earlier than boys and are more able and better equipped to compete with older players at a younger age. Also, the LTA say because 58% of players ranked top 50 in the ITF while under 16 that is the standard the LTA are aiming for with the GB players. The LTA also state that according to their data the average age of the top 100 players studied was 15.8 years when they got their first ranking and it came on in the mid 700s.

GBTG would like the following points to be considered

- The top 100 players that were studied had a much better chance of gaining an early ranking compared to those playing today due to a **ranking rule change**. The sample of top 100 players in 2007, when the average age of the top 100 was 31, means this data is likely to be in the most part from 10 years ago, 14 years ago if they were all ranked by the age of 16. Back then a player earned a ranking tournament simply from being in the first round of a \$10,000 event or a first round of any qualifier challenger event. You didn't have to win a match to get a ranking in those days.
- It is extremely likely that many of the 17 and 18 year girls who are not being funded by the LTA matrix system will have qualified for satellites and won rounds in challenger qualifying events although on today's system this will count for nothing as a player now has to qualify and win a round in main draw **three times** to get a ranking. Men of course only have to achieve this feat once.
- Regarding the 58% statistic, what about the other 42%? This is almost half which must give half the people not on track a chance at least? With the average age of the female top 100 over 30 surely there are plenty who weren't totally on track at 15?
- The top 100 surveyed had no GB players in it. Therefore, it is full of players from countries who have systems that are working in that they are continually producing players in the top 100. Is taking some age statistics from these successful players really the best thing to shape the whole British girls funding policy on given that our girls are having to play in the UK system which has never produced these early developers?
- Forming an unequal funding platform right from the age of 11 on the basis of this one trend seems extreme and grossly unfair. How can the LTA categorically say that at the age of 11 there are going to be twice as many boys as girls on track? We think you simply can't say that and by doing so sets the trend for girls being treated unequally in British tennis.
- Given the number of players on the computer in 1997, and the ranking rules that existed then, GBTG believe that if the same amount of resources were spent looking for different statistics they would be found. GBTG know of many players who came on to the computer at 750 (a couple of satellite quarter finals or so) who didn't make it into the top 100 in their careers.

- In the past 20 years or so the LTA have tried to implement systems based on what other countries do and it hasn't worked because the Brits are Brits. **What about doing some research on British players?** What about those who have got through (or almost) in the past 10 years or so. These players would not have been on track on the current day terms, and you could argue that if these standards were held up to the current number one (career high of 48 at age 24) when she was a junior she may not even be playing now. If you look at table 1.3 below it seems clear that we need more girls to still be competing aged 22-26 to have a chance of getting more girls in the top 100.

Table 1.3

MOST RECENT TOP 100 AND 110 WTA BRITISH PLAYERS					
	highest WTA	highest WTA age	highest Junior ITF	age at highest junior itf	On track at 15 in today terms?
Anne Keothavong*	48	25	60	LAST YEAR	NO
Melanie South*	99	22	266	LAST YEAR	NO
Elena Baltacha*	101	26	77	LAST YEAR	NO
Katie O'Brien*	102	23	101	LAST YEAR	NO
Sam Smith	57	26	n/a	n/a	NO
Clare Wood	77	26	n/a	n/a	NO
Louise Latimer	107	23	143	LAST YEAR	NO
*still playing					

- If you take the current policy and apply it to the past, Hannah Collin was a player who would have been considered as being on track reaching 14 in the junior world rankings, but unfortunately, Hannah didn't go on to do nearly as well as any of the girls listed above.
- GBTG are delighted that the current LTA administration, unlike their predecessors listened to GBTG (or did it off their own volition) and did not desert the old players ranked between 125 and 300. GBTG are certain that this decision is what has led to Anne making it to the top 50 with two or three more likely to make that top 100 ranking this year.
- In British tennis, good performances in world standard junior competition unfortunately doesn't translate into top 100 senior status. Perseverance is the essential ingredient and this current funding system does everything to discourage this vital trait in the young women playing tennis in the UK today.
- GBTG believe that fewer girls will be pursuing tennis seriously at age 17-19 because of being off track, and having looked at the actual players involved this year, fairly mediocre boys are still being encouraged to play in the older age groups where much comparatively stronger girls are being sent the message that there is no point.
- **Where is the research on the boys?** Thanks to all these statistics on the foreign female tennis player journey the girls are being held to a very high standard to qualify for national funding and the national championships. When the LTA coaches look at appendices A,B,C and D could they really say that these boys being funded are more likely to succeed than the girls not being funded or that the girls who fall into the funding are only equal to the boys? As the age groups progress the disparity just grows. If there is 16 boys on track at the age of 17 and only 3 girls then there is something seriously wrong with the coaching of girls in the UK. Or perhaps it is the system that is wrong?

- Apart from the mini tennis funding which is based on subjective PPP ratings, right from the word go when players start to compete on a full court with yellow balls it is assumed that twice as many boys as girls will be on track and therefore worthy of funding. This policy immediately makes the playing field uneven. This trend continues all the way through with boys getting more recognition and funding than girls. The 10th boy in GB should get the same as the 10th girl. How is the imbalance ever going to be redressed when the funding system perpetuates it? Please see appendices A, B, C D and E where a snap shot of just 4 out of 13 year groups shows a disparity of 50 girls to 106 boys being funded by a difference of £111,300.
- More is demanded of British girls than boys in terms of domestic and international ranking in order to be deemed worthy of support. However, the value of a female and male world no. 1 would, we hope, be equal, so therefore by extension that rationale must be applied to the no. 10, no. 100, no. 1000 in the world and funding and competitive opportunities awarded equally to boys and girls for such achievements.
- There are lots of stats given as to why girls need to be better earlier, but is there any proof that just because boys mature later this makes those being funded more on track? Why is the average age of the top 100 lower for men compared to women if girls always have to be two years ahead? Has this policy been decided because the head of women's tennis was a statistician and the head of men's tennis wasn't?

CONCLUSION

The LTA wants to raise the standards of its male and female players and its reaction to having a smaller and shallower player base on the girls' side (shallower is questionable given international rankings) is to limit and restrict significant competitive opportunities and funding.

On this same logic, given that there are more men than women playing tennis in the world, Wimbledon, and in fact all the Grand Slams, should have smaller draw sizes for the women. What if the British female juniors were in a worse state with just say 10 players with a junior ITF ranking, would cutting the draw right down really be a solution to the problem?

The best 32, 48, 64 or 80 in Britain should be competing for the title of national champion. Whichever number is chosen it should be the same for both sexes. The standards will not be raised by cutting off the opportunities. **Girls have enough reason to leave sport and tennis without adding unequal opportunities and funding based on statistics gained from foreign players in the top 100 in a given year.**

Improving the current Matrix funding system and levelling up the Nationals draw in all age groups will make tennis fairer but will not necessarily increase the player base. Specific initiatives need to be implemented to do this. GBTG has made many suggestions, but as far as we know, no such initiatives have ever been implemented.

The LTA need to look at what other more successful sports in GB do. For performance players the Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation has no evidence of any other sports funding boys and girls unequally and the lower participation rates **has never to their knowledge been used as an excuse to fund the girls less.**

On the contrary, other sports often implement positive action programmes where the girls are funded more through specific schemes with the very intent to raise participation rates. At the ages 16-18 Sport England's data shows that young women are only half as active as men in all sports so it's a crucial time to try to keep them involved in tennis.

The LTA needs initiatives to introduce, retain and encourage girls to play and stay in tennis even if they are not going to win Wimbledon and that way we may just get someone who does.

Appendix C - 1996 funding for girls v boys

1996 MATRIX FUNDING FOR BOYS AND GIRLS IF BASED ON RANKINGS AS OF SEP 20TH											
U14	GIRLS			BOYS			Rating	3500	2000	700	
UK	1996	4000	MATRIX A	2000	MATRIX B	MATRIX C	UK	1996	MATRIX A	MATRIX B	MATRIX C
	Eleanor Dean	YES ETA						Shakeel Manji	YES		
	Alice Keddle	YES ETA						Peter Ashley	YES		
	Harriet Dart	YES ETA						Johsua Paris	YES		
	Grace Dixon	YES ETA						Isaac stoute	YES		
	Katie Boulter			YES				Adam Glynn	YES		
	India Sanders			YES				Alexander Sendegeya	YES		
	Mareilla Blackwell			YES				Joshua Sapwell		YES	
	Hayley Macpherson			YES				Stefan Rhodes		YES	
	Sabrina Federica			YES				George Hedley		YES	
	Alannah Griffin			YES				Josef Dodridge		YES	
	Anouska Newnman							Christopher Egan-Morris		YES	
	Natalie Sayer				YES			Marc Huttman		YES	
	Nicole Shakhmazarova				YES			John Boden		YES	
	Pippa Carr				YES			Christopher Marrow		YES	
	Natalie Haden-Scott				YES			Julian Cash		YES	
	Alice Patch				YES			Oscar Pope		YES	YES
								Jamie Malik			YES
								Oliver Bickley			YES
								Giles Waterson			YES
								Lewis Roskilly			YES
								Sam Price			YES
								Russell Graham			YES
								Aswin Lizen			YES
								Joel Jones			YES
								Jared Linzell			YES
								Youseff Hassan			YES
								Nicholas Tayler			YES
								Archie Dent			YES
								Donovan Celluprea-Towers			YES
								Ben Stride			YES
								Luke Simeone			YES
								Toby Leonard			YES
		£16,000		£12,000		£4,900			£21,000	£20,000	£11,200
	TOTAL	£32,900					TOTAL		£52,200	DIFFERENCE : £19,300	
	POINTS										

Why in this is case is A £500 more for girls? £500 for 4 more girls does not redress the imbalance!

Appendix E - Comparative Matrix Funding for boys in numbers, money and years

Comparative MATRIX FUNDING FOR BOYS V GELS FROM ONLY 4 YEAR GROUPS (1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998)						
	NO OF GIRLS FUNDED	NO OF BOYS FUNDED	DIFFERENCE	MONEY TOTALS GIVEN TO GIRLS	MONEY TOTALS GIVEN TO BOYS	DIFFERENCE
1998	16	32	16	£32,200.00	£55,200.00	£23,000
1996	16	32	16	£32,900.00	£52,200.00	£19,300
1994	15	21	6	£34,000.00	£47,000.00	£13,000
1992	3	21	18	£12,000.00	£68,000.00	£56,000
TOTALS	50	106	56	£111,100.00	£222,400.00	£111,300.00

Comparative MATRIX FUNDING TOTAL YEARS		
	NO OF YEARS GIRLS FUNDED	NO OF YEARS BOYS FUNDED
Years	15	16
	AGES THAT GIRLS ARE FUNDED	AGES THAT BOYS ARE FUNDED
Age groups	8 yrs to 22 yrs	8 yrs to 23 yrs