

BBC Learning English

London Life

Tennis in the park



Callum: Hello, I'm Callum Robertson and this is London Life. The Wimbledon tennis championships have begun in South London. For the first time in 10 years there will be no British player who is seeded – or who is regarded as one of the top 32 players in the competition.

Britain does not have a history in recent years of producing top tennis players. One person who would like to see a change in this is Robby Sudhkeo who runs a tennis club in a park in the north London area of Haringey. The other day I made a trip out to the park to meet Robby, I asked him what he does.

ROBBY

I'm a tennis manager. I've hired some tennis courts and a pavilion from Haringey Council which I'm hoping to turn into a tennis centre and my job is to facilitate tennis and sport in the park.

Callum: His job, he says is to facilitate sport in the park. To facilitate. This means to help to make something possible. His main focus is tennis. Approximately how many people come to his courts each week?

ROBBY

I arrange tennis for children aging from 3 and 4 which we call toddlers up to adults, intermediate and advanced, private coaching. We have lots of children, 250 children come in a week, 100 adults.

Callum: In total there are about 350 people come each week, 250 children and 100 adults for different levels of coaching. I was surprised at how young some of the children were, only three or four years old – as Robbie said – toddlers. I asked him what sort of training they got.

ROBBY

We teach them, rather than tennis strokes we teach them to run, balance, socialise, hand eye coordination exercises, basically that's it for toddlers.

Callum: So the toddlers don't get training in playing tennis strokes, but they get to do different activities that involve developing basic skills like running and balancing, socialising or getting on with other children, and importantly hand-eye coordination. Hand eye coordination is an important skill in many sports and it means your eyes and hand working together, being able to move your hands in line with what you see, for example to hit a ball in tennis you have to be able to follow the ball with your eyes then move your hand with the racquet to hit the ball.

After talking to Robby, the coach I then went to talk to one of the parents who regularly brings her children to the tennis in the park.

PARENT

Well I've got three children doing tennis here, one's four and a half, one's seven and one's nine and a half.

And what do the children, what do they get out of the tennis here? Do they enjoy it or do you have to drag them along.

No they all really look forward to coming every Thursday. It's sort of a team effort with their friends, obviously all the ball skills, you know the healthy outdoor activity.

Callum: The tennis is a healthy outdoor activity which, she said, they really enjoy. And from what I saw they certainly do. I watched a group of youngsters having a lot of fun on the courts. I asked one of them why she liked tennis.

STUDENT

I like playing tennis because it's good exercise for the arms and I'm very good at it and I like tennis because it's a very good exercise.

And one day will you be playing tennis on the Centre Court at Wimbledon?

Never know, maybe!

Callum: So who knows, maybe in the future we'll see some of Robby's students playing at the highest level.

Before I left the park I ask Robbie why he thought it was that Britain wasn't regularly producing high class tennis players.

ROBBY

I feel the facilities generally around the country are poor, particularly in the parks. I feel in this country you need to upgrade the parks. If you get lots of people playing tennis you'll improve the club structure. A lot of money goes into the clubs but probably less than 20% of the people that play tennis play at clubs, so it's the parks is the place to find new tennis players and also to bring on new tennis players.

Callum: He feels the problems start with the quality of the facilities and that too much money goes to private clubs rather than public parks. The parks are the best place to find and 'bring on' new players. To bring on new players, to train them and make them better.

Well we wish Robby good luck with his project to develop his tennis centre. That's all from this edition of London Life.