

The Dedanist δ



*Tennis court, Westwood Country Club, Washington, DC.
Venue for World Championship Challenge, 17th, 19th, 23rd September 2023*

From The Editors

This issue should, of course, be a Coronation Edition, but regrettably, there is little within it to link to the truly spectacular events of 6th May, apart from a passing reference to Prince Edward and his attendance last November at the Gala Opening of the new USA court chosen to host this Autumn's World Championship challenge, and which features above. Otherwise, the content includes, as usual, an update on the activities of the Academy, a number of articles regarding the history of the game, and, as ever, most apposite advice on tactics to be employed on court in the heat of the moment from our Honorary Professional, Nick Wood. This issue opens however on a sombre note, with an appreciation of a long-standing and much respected Dedanist.

The next edition will be in December 2023.

Alastair Robson
Martin Village

Dr ADAM LAWRENCE – a personal memoir

Adam Lawrence died on 18th November 2022, aged 89. He was an elegant left-handed tennis player, (and a Cambridge blue), with a fine eye for the ball. He was one of the earliest Dedanists, having been elected in December 2004. He studied medicine at Cambridge and St Thomas's, qualified in 1962, and was a junior Hospital doctor there and at St Stephen's Hospital, Chelsea.

He then moved to the American Hospital in Paris, and played tennis in Rue Lauriston. Being resident in France, he was eligible to enter the 'Racquet d'Argent' in 1963 (which he won) and the 'Racquet d'Or' in 1964 (which he also won). He returned to England to further his medical career in GU medicine & HIV, at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital, (St Stephen's modern replacement), and continued to play tennis at the RTC at Hampton Court, and at Queen's.

His recent obituary in the British Medical Journal reported: 'his staff and patients in his clinics were fiercely loyal as he was a good boss and a kind and generous man. He was also full of fun and his clinic parties were legendary'. This I can well believe – he was very good fun indeed: at the 2017 Trophée Édouard Kressmann in Fontainebleau, his partnership with Gil Kressmann, (Édouard's son), was equally legendary – the photo is, as they say, self-explanatory.



At the visit by the Dedanists to Paris in January 2020, Adam's last, after dinner on the Saturday evening with the Paris members and their spouses, a few of us went for a 'nightcap' to a small bar around the corner from the court. It was, after all, Burns' Night – which the French didn't really understand at all, (but then we don't go in for Bastille Day in a big way either, so they are forgiven): chatting away, it transpired that our fathers were both born in Aberdeen, within a stone's throw of each other! We came to understand each other perfectly – of course, it might just have been the Laphroaig...

The following morning, Adam appeared on court *un petit peu en retard* – “that naughty Rabbie Burns” was his apology – but with some hasty rescheduling of games, he was included in our traditional Dedanists’ Sunday mini-competition – which he went on to win, jointly, with Rémy Salmon, the Paris member who, each year, invariably asks to be included. They had to share the prize, a bottle of champagne – I hadn’t anticipated more than one winner!

THE DEDANISTS, PARIS – January 2020

Joint Winners: Dr Rémy Salmon & Dr Adam Lawrence;
Runner-Up: Dr David Phillips
Prize presented by Dr Alastair Robson (match manager)

So, a physician, a breast surgeon, an ENT surgeon, and a GP, are recorded in the rubric to the photo. Will that ever be repeated? I doubt it – it may become as legendary in Dedanist folklore as the entry in Wisden: ‘Lillie, caught Willey, bowled Dilley’. Adam would, I think, have been amused at such nonsense.



I conclude with the words of a fellow Dedanist, which informed me of Adam’s very sad demise: “We have all lost a true friend, a real character, a gentleman with ‘old school’ values who nevertheless managed to keep up with, and often be ahead of, the times.”
A.M.R.



Paris, January 2020

Dr Adam Lawrence (1933–2022)
REQUIESCE IN PACE

Dates for your Diary...

Dedanists' fixtures 2023

Sat 10 June Cambridge MM Christie Marrion

Sun 11 June Prested MM Chris Vigrass

Sat 17 June LRTA/Hardwick MM Carl Snitcher

Wed 6 July Pro-Am/Queen's MM Josh Farrell

Sat 8 July Oxford MM Freddy Adam

Sun 9 July Radley MM Freddy Adam

**If you wish to
play in any
fixture
Please contact
the
Match Manager**



Wood's Words:

More pearls of wisdom from our Honorary Professional!

Choosing the right target at the right time is what makes for a successful campaign.

There are many targets to hit on the real tennis court – The most obvious: the Dedans, Grille and Winning Gallery. However, these are generally high-risk options. There are many alternative areas of the court that could win you the point, and that have a far greater success rate.

The secret is to reduce your errors whilst increasing your accuracy. Unfortunately though, too many players try to either 'thread the needle' – a Grille shot, or go for power or sever cut – which massively increases the risk; turning a winning opportunity into an unforced error or loss of control! Too often, one's ambition and skill level are misplaced, and it ends in disaster!

Rule 1. Do not make an unforced error - hitting into the net or out of court.

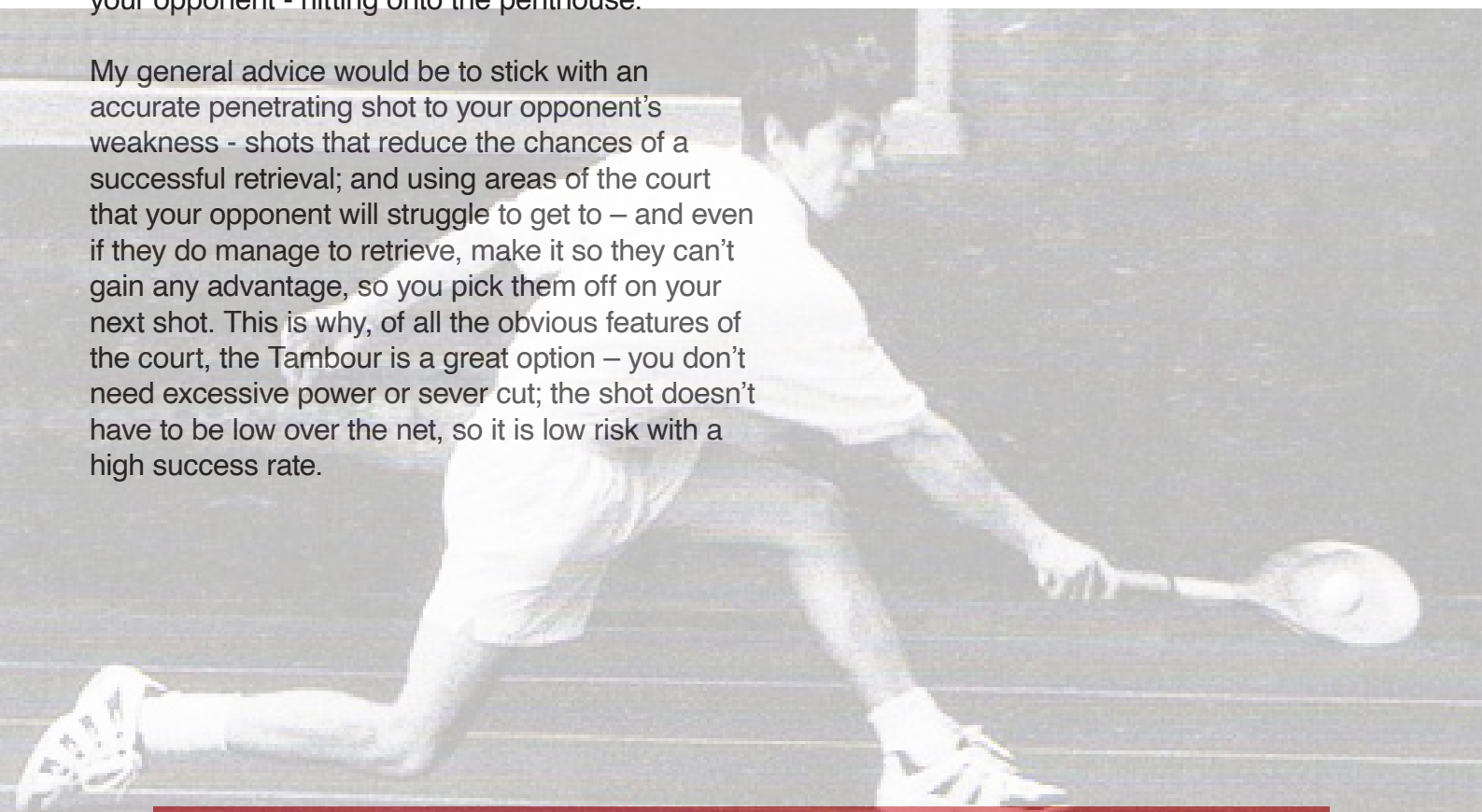
Rule 2. Do not hand the advantage straight back to your opponent - hitting onto the penthouse.

My general advice would be to stick with an accurate penetrating shot to your opponent's weakness - shots that reduce the chances of a successful retrieval; and using areas of the court that your opponent will struggle to get to – and even if they do manage to retrieve, make it so they can't gain any advantage, so you pick them off on your next shot. This is why, of all the obvious features of the court, the Tambour is a great option – you don't need excessive power or sever cut; the shot doesn't have to be low over the net, so it is low risk with a high success rate.

However, players become obsessed with hitting the Tambour! Watch out - when out of position – orientation of player to ball - a shot to the Tambour becomes high risk. As an alternative, a simple good length stroke under the winning gallery would suffice and is highly successful.

Be aware that often the best shot option is determined by the situation / orientation the player is in, and not the ambitious / predetermined shot. Recognise the situation you find yourself in and play the appropriate shot. Successfully predetermining the shot only comes when you can assuredly put yourself in the right position at the right time – and that takes great skill and practice!

Therefore, your strategy should put you at the Service end; then work your feet so the Tambour is a viable and low risk option. And if it doesn't present itself, then the floor areas such as the above example is a highly effective way to end a rally, or maintain the advantage, giving you further opportunities to go for the Tambour.



From the Academy

Youth development



What a Season!

Since our last Newsletter members of our Academy Squads have had an astounding run of successes in both junior and senior events! Will Flynn won the British Under 24 Doubles (with Max Trueman) and then went on to win the British U21 and U24 singles.

As well as winning the U24 Doubles event, Max Trueman crowned a great season by winning the Seacourt Silver Racquet and then the coveted Tuxedo Gold Racket tournaments - both senior prestigious events.

Rob Shenkman had a famous victory at the British Amateur, Cesca Sweet won the inaugural Girls U19 World Championships and Max Warner won the Category "E" handicap event. Last but by no means least, Cadet Squad member Caspian Rugg (age 13) won the French Junior Singles Championships in Fontainbleau.

The Academy goes from strength to strength!



From Other Courts

Away

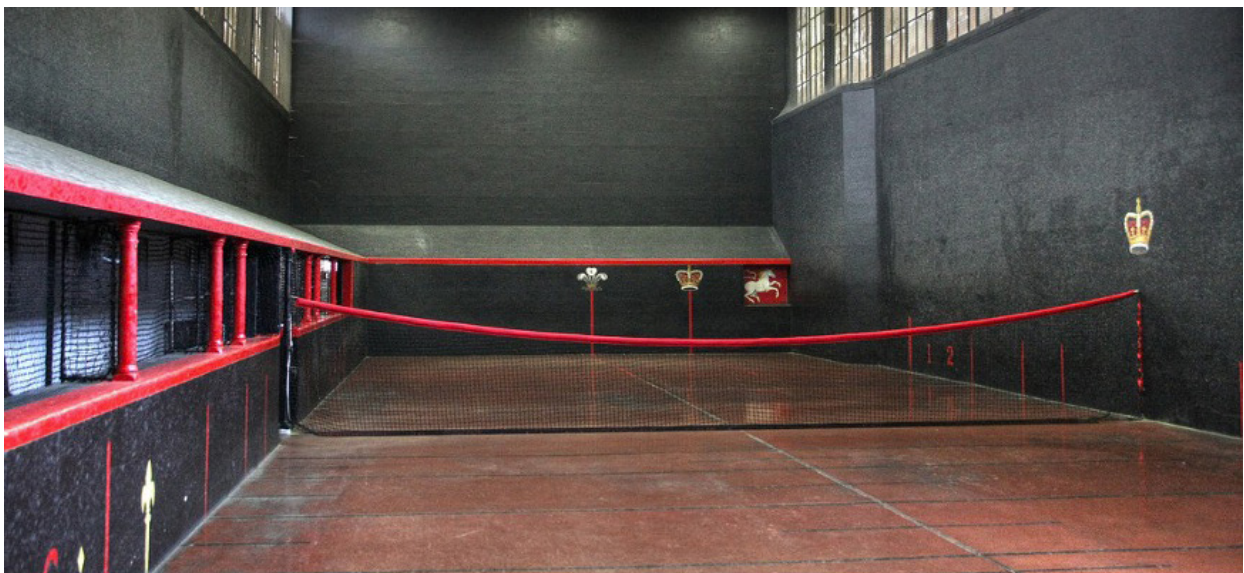
The Dedanists visited Paris in February this year; Covid preventing visits to Rue Lauriston since January 2020. Once the match was under way, the visitors were reminded that the ‘pass rule’ – albeit diluted somewhat – still exists in France. What am I talking about?

If, on serving, the ball hits the service penthouse in the ordinary way but then rolls along the grille penthouse and continues to do so until it hits the tambour wall then a fault is called in the usual manner, but, back in the day, the marker would call a ‘pass’ if the ball rolled along the grille penthouse and dropped on the floor in the box near the grille (the ‘pass court’): this rule annulled the fault, allowing the server to continue to serve in such a manner repeatedly – until a serve either dropped from the penthouse within the receiving court and so had to be played by the receiver, or if the receiver decided to make the serve good by taking the ball full-volley off the penthouse grille (if it had not passed beyond the penthouse pass line, even if, untouched, it might have dropped in the pass court). [There was another complicated rule in France whereby this was the case only if the receiver’s feet were within the receiving court – but this did not apply in England...]

In the 1980s the T&RA decided a ‘pass’ should become a fault to prevent such repeated serves – sometimes to the point of exasperation of all concerned (except the server) – and the ‘pass line’ on the floor is now called the ‘fault line’. (Of course, a serve where the ball lands on the pass/fault line is good).

In France, where the T&RA has no influence, one ‘pass’ is still allowed – but a second ‘pass’ served is deemed a fault.

The ‘pass line’ on the floor is continued up the grille wall on all courts, with varying degrees of elegance (Oxford’s is particularly flamboyant – see photo).



In the UK, the Moreton Morrell court is the only court which still retains a pass line on the grille penthouse [see photo] – but does not recognise a ‘pass’; Paris does not have a pass line on the grille penthouse [see photo] – but retains the ‘pass rule’ (just).



The Moreton Morrell court: the pass line on the grille wall extends onto the grille penthouse.

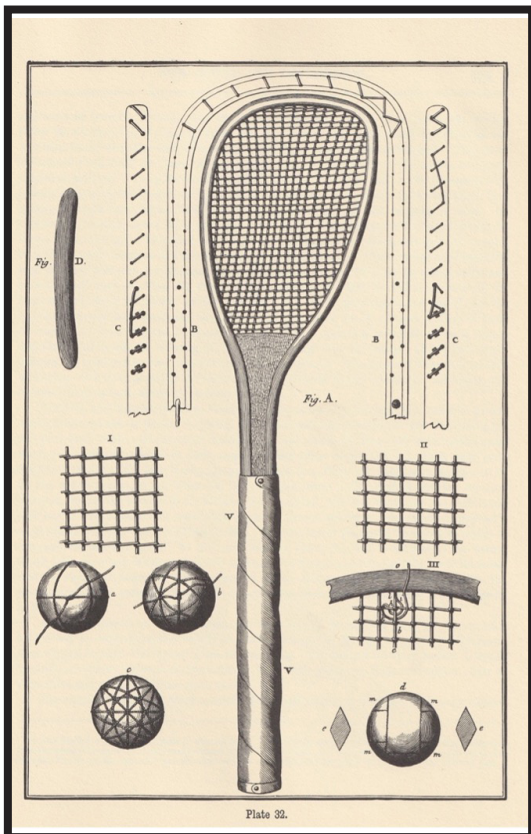


The Paris court: the pass line does not extend onto the grille penthouse.

From Behind the Grille

Articles mainly about the history of tennis

The Leamington Club has recently taken possession of an ancient tennis racquet [old spelling throughout] with a ball attached to its strings (see photograph): it has come from a member, but unfortunately it is not possible to obtain its age or any of its provenance.



The ball is interesting: on closer inspection it has panels of cloth stitched in the original style of ball making, with lozenge-shaped panels, similar to the ball depicted in the bottom right-hand corner of the 'Plate 32' illustration. This dates it to earlier than 1870, when (according to Julian Marshall's 'Annals of Tennis') the modern method of stitching together two figure-of-eight cloth panels was introduced in England, although he says the original method persisted in France for some time longer. Turning to the racquet: it looks less elegant than the Club's Brouaye racquet in the glass case in the lounge –



[with apologies for the reflections of the [now electric] gas mantle lights...]

With its green velvet grip and elegant silver pommel, this is the 'Milne presentation racquet', awarded annually to the winner of the Varsity Match in the 1870s. It is very similar to another Brouaye 'presentation racquet', inscribed 'J H Walter Balliol 1858' on the silver pommel, which was sold at Christie's by auction for £19,200 in 2005.

The French dominated racquet-making in the 1800s, and Brouaye was one of the best makers: Julian Marshall considered the Brouaye racquet was perfection – 'as perfect in shape as it appears at present possible to imagine a racquet'. (He hadn't met the Grays Xtra-Tech, of course...).

They are identifiable by the green or red [standard and semi-tec, maybe?] painted insert in the throat, extending into the shaft of the handle:

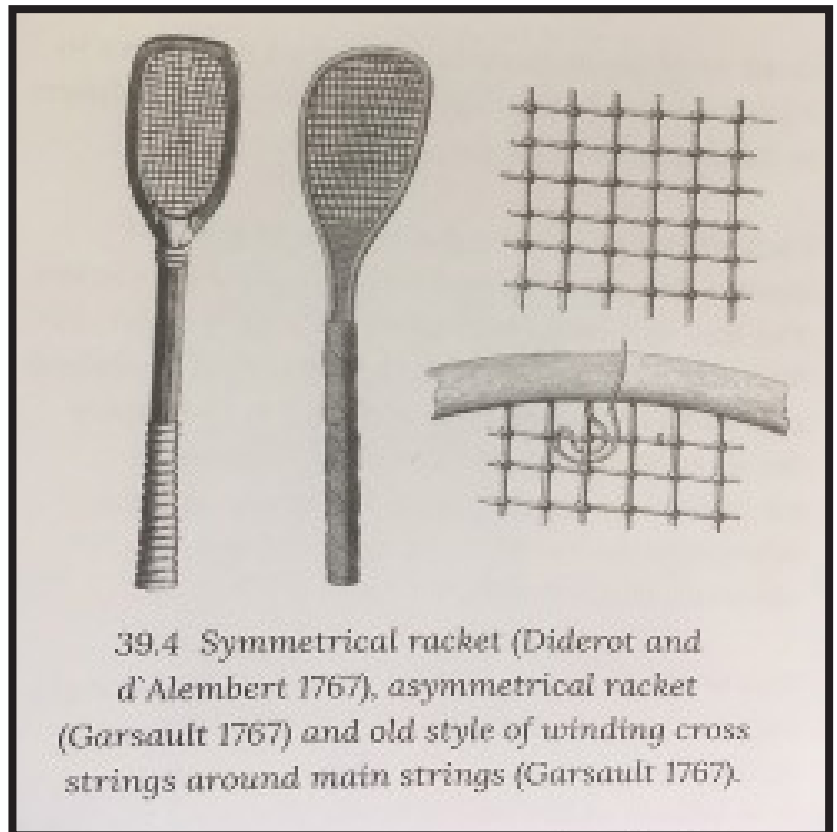


I suspect Judith Lytton (later Lady Wentworth of Crabbet Park) in the photo above, taken about 1911 at a guess, is playing with a Brouaye – and no doubt taking her (invariably male) opponent apart, which she did regularly.

The donated racquet is just a touch more crudely made and I suspect the balance is not as good as the Brouaye (not really possible to compare!). It has no identifiable maker's marks (unless under the grip) and resembles more the English Petworth racquet of c1800-1810 (see below). This would have been the type of racquet used by Wellington and Napoleon (neither of whom had much interest nor aptitude for the game – despite the one having a tennis court at Stratfield Saye and the other at Fontainebleau).



But there is a fly in the ointment: the racquet has been strung in natural gut (so far so good), but (surprisingly) using the 'over-under weave' stringing method such as is in use today; this was introduced in about 1850, as evidenced in the Milne racquet, rapidly replacing the earlier technique of 'knotting', where transverse strings were slightly smaller in diameter and wrapped once around the vertical strings, thus making a 'smooth' and 'rough' side; (excellent for 'cut', but had considerably less tension than 'over-under' stringing). See below:



Early racquets had grips, but after about 1870, according to Julian Marshall, they did not: true enough, for Julia Lytton's Brouaye doesn't appear to have one.

So, all very confusing: is this an early racquet, with its narrow head and grip, (probably) re-strung post-1850 in the modern manner, or of later post-1850 origin (possibly)?

An interesting acquisition for the Club: might anyone have any further information to assist in dating the racquet more accurately? Dendrochronology might be helpful.

The following books were particularly useful:

'Annals of Tennis' Julian Marshall (1878)

'From Palm to Power; the evolution of the racket' Peter Maxton (2008)

'Real Tennis Today and Yesterday' John Shneerson (2015)

'Tennis and Rackets' Lord Aberdare (2001)

Whispers in the Galleries

Gossip and tittle-tattle from the world of tennis

The World Championship Challenge is to be played again this year in September, at the new tennis court at Westwood Park Country Club, near Washington D.C. A member from Moreton Morrell visited the court last November and commented in a club circular (among other things) that ‘the tambour is out 13 degrees, thus sending balls to hazard one-and-two’.

An adviser on the building of recent new tennis courts in the UK observed: “460 adjacent and the hypotenuse of 753 produces the right angle. This would have resulted in angles of 53 and 37. They measured an angle of 37 which should have been 53 so ‘back to front’.”

This sounds like an elementary but major construction error, (was the builder holding the plans upside down??) and was discussed with Haven Pell, one of the prime instigators of the new court, at Leamington TCC, during his recent book promotion tour of the UK, who admitted the error and that explained that moves are now afoot to rectify the tambour angle so that balls will be deflected into the service area – at a cost of \$15 000. (I had heard the figure \$50 000 mentioned some time earlier – but that was in conversation in a noisy restaurant...).

He has reported elsewhere that the same problem occurred during construction of the Prince’s Court in Washington (Westwood’s predecessor), which was solved by moving the service line at the receiving end 2 feet nearer the net – presumably by altering floor markings for hazard chases...I don’t think the World Champion and his challenger would have been pleased with that solution again!

