

## Ollie Toms – Remembrance Evening – Feb 2024

Good evening everyone, thank you for coming to our event tonight. I would especially like to thank Glenis and Pete, Ollie's parents for coming along, their attendance here means a lot to us.

Tonight is about Ollie, it is an opportunity to share our thoughts, reflections, who he was, what he meant to you and the club, how we will remember him, his legacy and how we intend to carry that on.

During the evening, we will be;

- Dedicating a new tree to Ollie which we have planted.
- Inviting the children Ollie coached to come and celebrate what Ollie meant to them through drawings and comments or in whatever way they would like. Louise, who has organised this evening's activities will explain how we will do that.
- Ollie would have wanted us to continue his coaching work and achievements and we will explain how we plan to carry on that on. More of that later, but while we are here, I would like to introduce some of the coaches, Martyn, Phil, Dan, James whom some of you will know already. Helpers; Alex, Ellen, Marissa
- Finally, play some tennis, and enjoy the game Ollie loved so much!

Of course, if anyone would like to say something during this evening you are very welcome to do so.

Behind me is a beautiful Photinia Red Robin Tree, planted for Ollie. We often sit in this area watching tennis or walking past it to the car park, so it will remain as a reminder for many years to come.

By the tree you will see a plaque with a beautiful inscription written by Louise, It reads;

*'In loving memory of our wonderful coach and good friend. You were taken too soon, but will stay in our hearts forever' Ollie Toms 2 Jun 1988 to 6 Oct 2023*

I hope you agree it captures very well our thoughts and feelings about Ollie. Thank you, Louise, for your perfect words, and thank you for organizing the event this evening.

I would now like to say some words which reflect how many people in the club feel about Ollie;

To say that Ollie was an extraordinary person would be an understatement. In our lifetimes, we all meet people whom we would describe as 'inspirational'. They are people whom you instinctively know are special. They are people you always remember. In every way Ollie is one of those people. Very much 'one of a kind', completely unique and totally irreplaceable.

Ollie came to our club in 2018, where he initially started Cardio Tennis. At this time, for various reasons, the junior coaching had virtually ceased. This was something the Committee was determined to reverse. Fortunately, Ollie came to us with a plan on how to bring back and encourage youngsters to the club. Amongst many activities, this involved visiting all the Headteachers at the local primary and secondary schools, explaining how we could enrich their curriculums by offering tennis to their pupils. Ollie then followed this up with school assemblies where he enthralled the audience, young and old alike. This along with various 'Big Tennis Weekends', and other open day events which Ollie organised resulted in growing our junior section to over 85. A formidable outcome by any measure.

However, growing the junior tennis cohort, whilst in itself being a great achievement, is really only the tip of the iceberg. Ollie possessed extraordinary skills in the way he engaged with people at all levels, he had a unique ability to encourage and nurture people, regardless of their abilities or age. He was someone who put you at ease immediately and who you thought of as a friend from the outset. On many occasions, I heard people say how he brightened their lives, even at times of real darkness. This was particularly the case during the Covid lockdowns, when he kept in touch through video messages and encouraging people to do tennis exercises from home.

There is no doubt that Ollie's contribution to tennis is immeasurable and his legacy will be felt by many people for years to come. I know personally that every time I play tennis, I hear his voice giving some guidance or amusing anecdote, so he's always there! I am sure many of you experience the same thing!

Ollie has been a great ambassador for the sport and in my opinion could not have done more. He was by any measure an extraordinary person and an inspiration to us all. He possessed a maturity beyond his years and I have no doubt would have gone on to do many more great things for the sport he loved.

Last year, Ollie in recognition of his achievements, was awarded the 'The Essex Tennis Commendation Award 2024'. Glenis and Pete supported by ourselves have also nominated Ollie for the LTA President's award. We await the outcome.