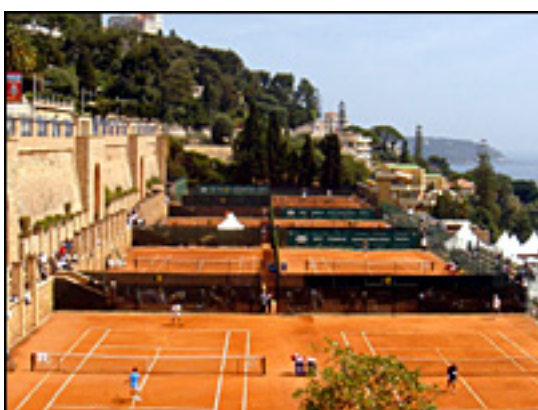


British tennis looks to Monte Carlo

Monte Carlo - playground for the rich and famous, tax-haven for the world's greatest athletes, and home to the most well-known Grand Prix race on the planet.



The Monte Carlo Country Club provides a dramatic backdrop

Never before has this exclusive part of Monaco been associated with the future of British tennis, until now.

The Monte Carlo Tennis Academy, launched in 2006, is now providing one of the platforms from which British tennis hopes to develop the next Andy Murray and Tim Henman.

For decades, the Monte Carlo Country Club has held a prestigious tennis tournament, with Bjorn Borg, Pete Sampras and Roger Federer gracing its world-renowned clay courts.

Many of today's current stars live within a stone's throw of the crystal blue Mediterranean waters that provide an idyllic backdrop to one of the world's most exclusive tennis clubs.

Those factors inspired tennis coach David Sammel and entrepreneur Vincent Hillsdon to approach the Monte Carlo Country Club with their dream - to create the first ever travelling tennis academy, and the first to be based at the Monte Carlo Country Club.

“ To transform British tennis, we need to maximise our players' potential at all levels by working with the very best ”

LTA chief Roger Draper

Their goal? To discover, train and manage the best junior talent into becoming top professionals.

With the eventual goal of having six full-time players, at present, the academy has three - Anna Fitzpatrick, Oscar Podlewski and Ilija Vucic, two of whom are British.

Fitzpatrick, a 17-year-old from Sheffield who won her first ITF senior tournament last year in Ilkley, is the second-youngest player in Britain's top 20, while Podlewski, an 18-year-old of Polish descent, is quickly making the transition from junior to senior tournaments.

Vucic, a 16-year-old from Serbia, qualified for the Australian Open Junior tournament last month.

"To get a place at this academy is such a great experience, it's unbelievable," said Fitzpatrick. "You can't train anywhere better in the world."

The players spend seven weeks of the year at the Monte Carlo Country Club with the rest of the year spent training and playing in tournaments all over the world, from Australia to Florida, Sunderland to Wimbledon.



Oscar Podlewski, Anna Fitzpatrick and Ilija Vucic are the first academy members

"Players have to tour," said MCTA Chairman Hillsdon, who financially supported and mentored Formula One star Mark Webber while he was working his way to the top through Formula 3000.

"Other academies play in the same place, on the same courts, in the same conditions day in day out, but we start in Australia and go on to other tournaments throughout the year.

"It's very exciting to see the youngsters benefiting from this. They have decided that tennis is their career, so being able to be part of that is very exciting."

Sammel previously coached seven British Davis Cup players and spent four years as head coach at the LTA academy in Bolton and Leeds before setting up the MCTA

"We know what abilities and mental strengths players need to make the top 100 and beyond," he said. "It's great when you find them and can help to develop them."

LTA chief Roger Draper has given the initiative his full backing.

"To transform British tennis, we need to maximise our players' potential at all levels by working with the very best," said Draper.

"That's why we are behind the Monte Carlo Tennis Academy.

"Our players will have access to world-class coaches in world-class facilities outside Great Britain both as a base and on the tour."

Working with Sammel are fellow coaches Igor Tomasevic and Antony Hampson - former hitting partner for Martina Hingis and Justine Henin-Hardenne - as well as full-time fitness trainer Jez Green.

The Monte Carlo Tennis Academy has already captured the attention of current world number eight Ivan Ljubicic, who is just one of many top professionals living and practising in Monte Carlo.

"To organise such a thing here at the Country Club with such great facilities is a great idea," said the Croatian at the academy's launch.

As the first of its kind to be hosted by the Monte Carlo Country Club in its 80-year history, the academy is already history in the making.

Now it's down to the players themselves to take advantage.

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