

**Tonbridge Sports Association
Annual Report 2009/2010**

The Tonbridge Sports Association was formed on 5th May 1920. This year sees our 90th anniversary.

The Racecourse Sportsground, next to the Castle and running almost the length of the High Street, was originally used for horse racing. In 1920 The Tonbridge Urban District Council decided to lease 14 acres of the Racecourse meadows to exercise some control and allow a wider sporting use. It was decided to entrust the administration of the area to a separate organisation. The Tonbridge Sports Association, which was to represent all the clubs who would use the ground, was established to allocate areas of play, set and collect rents and liaise with the Council in the maintenance. By 1923 the major part of the Sportsground had been purchased and the original sports played were cricket and tennis although the first event was a rugby match.

This role continued for 67 years, until 1987 when the responsibility for the letting of facilities reverted to the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. At that time the facilities had expanded to include Tonbridge Farm, Swanmead and Frogbridge. Also the Association had expanded to include the surrounding parishes of Hadlow and Hildenborough. It is recorded that the Association is the oldest and largest such organisation in the country acting independently of the local Council.

The Association is pleased to report that sport on the grounds has been a success, almost every branch of sport being played. Clubs have done their best to make this a success. The delegates of the Clubs, who form the committees, have worked hard for all the clubs concerned. We are pleased to state that all pitches continue to be let. We very much appreciate the use of the grounds which are such a valuable asset to the town.

The words in the above paragraph are an extract from the Association's annual report, dated May 1929, looking back over its 9th year. It is now the 90th year and the tone of reports continue in the same vein. However, now the Association represents over 60 clubs engaging in 20 different sports. These clubs have a combined membership of over 6,500 ranging from 5 years of age to well into retirement.

Variations on sport have developed over the years. The Racecourse Sportsground is now predominately junior football and rugby. However one cricket club continues to use the Racecourse, which is Tonbridge YMCA, a club that was founded in 1888. Tonbridge Hockey Club also played there and was very successful for a considerable number of years. The many tennis clubs used over 30 courts until 1993. These clubs, like in other sports, derived from the social sections of local businesses. The ability for the clubs to survive on a loyal, but low, membership and the desire for more specialised playing surfaces has seen the clubs amalgamate and move on to other areas of the town.

By working in partnership, with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, the Association has been involved in discussions concerning the Tonbridge Farm sportsground, the swimming pool, the athletics track, the golf course and the all-weather facilities. Each of these, and the other facilities, continue to be the subject of consultation for improvements and redevelopment. The reconfiguration of the land that was used by the archery club and the culverting of the stream have contributed to the success of the Rugby club. Recent local newspaper reports record the successes of the Rugby Club, the Bowls Club, the Athletics Club and the Judo club. Football at Swanmead is now in a higher division and cricket, particularly junior cricket, is expanding. Clubs continue to improve themselves with Tonbridge Tennis Club being the latest to be awarded ClubMark status. One should also mention Canoeing and Angling. The Sailing Club is expanding and the recently received Sport England grant is much deserved. The year 2010 now sees discussion on improving the facilities for the Judo Club as it becomes involved in the build up for the 2012 Olympics.

It has been mentioned that sports have a desire for better playing surfaces and this is most evident in training facilities that are also all year round. In the year under review we have a new all-weather training facility, at Tonbridge School, arising from a large financial input from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. This was opened, by the Mayor, in September 2009, and has proved a great success. The community use agreement allows local junior football clubs full use of the facilities every weekday evening. There are now plans for an all-weather facility to be built at Hayesbrook School which may be available for community use.

In looking back over a year there is a tendency to report on all that has improved for the sports participators in Tonbridge and its surrounding areas. However we also have to manage the other issues that affect the clubs. For many years the town has had flooding issues and these continue. The finances of some clubs are stretched and the extra help from grants are currently unavailable. We have had to deal with litter issues and the problems regarding dog fouling seem to be ever increasing.

Junior clubs and the junior sections of clubs continue to be of the utmost importance. These are the players and participators of the sports in the future. The Association, as part of the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council liaison, participates in the constant review of Sports Development. We are pleased to see that sport and leisure development remains an element of our Council's policies and this directly and indirectly reflects on our member clubs.

The statement, in the 1929 report, was that the committees of the clubs had worked hard for the welfare of all the clubs concerned. This very much continues today and is the backbone of why we have successful and well managed clubs as members of the Association. It is also that we have a process whereby the Association continues to work in partnership with the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to provide a means by which all those who want to play sport have an opportunity to play and that the facilities are continually the subject of improvements.