

PROFILE OF A PLAYER

Tim's Stock Rising

Timothy Stock is a name to remember. He is only 19 now, and many of those reading this may not have come across him. But anyone with an interest in fives and the welfare of the game should take a look at this young man, because the future's bright: the future's orange. Well, ginger, at least.

I first knew Tim at St. Dunstan's College, when I was captain of the fives club and he was its rawest recruit, aged only 12, singled out largely for his diminutive stature and excitingly ginger mop. Even then, his appetite for the game was enormous, and he made up for his relative slightness by learning his angles and ending rallies as quickly as possible. Often, however, he found himself chasing all over the court, as larger opponents sprayed the ball about, seeking to grind him down.

It didn't work. Lessons learned in the grim November cold of St. Dunstan's courts are lessons not easily forgotten, and Tim learned fast. Never give up. never play your opponent's game. Go for your shots.

Gradually this attitude began to pay off. As he progressed from retrieval to strokeplay, the silverware accumulated. First came the National Colts' Singles title, a year young indeed. This title was successfully defended - a rarity at that age - and the transition to young man's fives undertaken. In 1995, Tim claimed the National Schools' Open Singles title and was believed by many watching to be the most accomplished champion for many seasons.

Tim also formed a highly effective trophy-winning doubles partnership with Paul Campbell, mixing their differing talents to great effect.

The most striking aspect of Tim's career to date, however, has been not his schoolboy successes, notable though they are, but the impact he has made with his step up to the more senior levels of the game.

Having played with admirable resolve in his first open tournament, the London Championships of September 1995, he made his mark in the BUSA tournament, giving eventual winner Ian Purvis, another rising young star, a good tussle in the quarter-final. That would be the first of the pair's three encounters in the 1995-96 season.

The next came at the National Under 25s in January 1996, where Tim took the first game against Ian, who has reached the quarter-finals of the last two Open singles competitions. A marvellously tense match ended in another Purvis victory and was followed at the Club Knock-out in April by a third. Each encounter had been closer than the previous one, and the spectator got the feeling that these were the first exchanges in a long rivalry.

It was, however, in the first round of doubles during the Old Dunstonians' match with Manchester YMCA at the Club Knock-out that Tim really made his presence felt. Partnering me on the left against Wayne Enstone and John Beswick, he produced the best doubles performance by a student I have ever seen. Several times he left Wayne and John standing with his reverse angles, and the sheer pace of his returns was Agassi-esque. The final score of 7-11, 11-7 was one Tim can use as a stepping-stone to still better things, and he will surely be at the centre of the Old Dunstonians' return to the fives world.

The following are facts:

1. I have been humiliated/thrashed/annihilated/crunched/amusingly swept aside by many of my fellow players, but none have outplayed me with such verve and often unanswerable brilliance as Stock.
2. This isn't just my problem. I've seen him do it to lots of people.
3. At only 19, he has a horrific potential competitive lifespan. By Wayne standards - hardly common admittedly, but still - Tim could be playing 25 more opens before he peaks.
4. He is always getting better. Sounds obvious, but too many of our recent emerging talents have not fulfilled their true potential.
5. He has an enthusiasm for the game which marks him out from other talented school-leavers. He rings you up because he wants to play/annihilate you.

Bearing all this in mind, it is a great pleasure to be able to extol Mr Stock's virtues. The sport needs players like him, to take risks and go for their shots. Those who want him to succeed must balance their assertions that more patience, more percentages will win him more games with support for his creative approach. Without the entertainers, the game's not worth playing.

Paddy d'Ancona