

Court People

From Beginner Programmes to Interclub Play

Caitlin's journey

In picking up a racquet again after not playing tennis since her high school days, Caitlin already had a goal in mind. From the beginning, her vision was to play interclub. Goal-oriented and determined, she began her tennis journey with Tennis Xpress, an adult beginner programme at Tennis Auckland's indoor centre on Merton Road, St Johns.

The coaching experience

Caitlin found the experience beneficial because it enabled her to develop foundational skills. Although she had to pause during lockdown in August 2021, she restarted playing outdoors as restrictions permitted.

She had fun learning tennis and meeting people of similar ability over a range of ages in a relaxed atmosphere.

Progressing through the Tennis Auckland Player Pathway for two years, over six cycles, Caitlin participated in two terms of Tennis Xpress and also the Tennis Advance and Tennis Compete strands. As she progressed, she came across players with the same or better skills. Tennis Auckland provided great coaches, which encouraged her to keep learning. Her tennis skills accelerated in the more advanced courses.

Joining a club

Pursuing her quest to compete at club level, she began looking around for a tennis club to join. She had heard good things about St Heliers Tennis Club, along with its beautiful location and views.

We asked Caitlin what attracted her to this particular tennis club.

- 1 Location: Caitlin lives 15 minutes away from the St Heliers Tennis Club
- 2 People at the club were welcoming and the club culture appeared entirely friendly
- 3 She had heard that club nights were fun, accessible and well-organised
- 4 The club's structured activities were well presented and communicated

So, she took the plunge and signed up!



Left: Where it all started for Caitlin

Right: Post interclub triumph 2024



What the tennis club offered

The Tennis Fit nights introduced her to various drills that progressed throughout the evening, providing valuable practice through short, focused games. The club members were consistent and reliable, showing up regularly and adding to the supportive environment.

The fun summer tournaments provided an excellent opportunity for improvement, offering her first real experience with competitive match play.

This experience encouraged her to join drills nights and Winter Interclub.

Reflections

Another rewarding aspect was the social connection—she met many women of similar skill levels. A friendly, social atmosphere enriches the learning journey, and developing alongside the same group builds a circle of friends to practice with outside of class time.

Caitlin praises tennis as an excellent form of exercise that supports both physical and mental well-being.

In terms of beginners overcoming challenges and progressing her advice is:

- Start with lessons. Find a coach at a club or tennis centre offering National Tennis Programmes
- Avoid self-criticism or fearing the judgement of others
- Don't compete with other players - go at your own pace

Benefits of using proper equipment

Caitlin highlighted the need for the right gear for advancing players keen to play more. The investment in the right shoes and racquet contributes to on-court success, motivating players to keep up classes and playing tennis.

Starting your tennis journey at Merton Road offers two key advantages: access to Tennis Xpress classes and the on-site Pro Shop, Players Sports. Caitlin (whose husband Mike owns Players Sports, New Zealand's top online and offline tennis equipment retailer), understands the value of proper gear. Their Merton Road location houses the largest selection of racquets in the country.

Caitlin has noticed that beginners often struggle due to inappropriate footwear, with many slipping and sliding. Mike's advice is that players starting with Tennis Xpress need suitable shoes so not to inhibit their progress. While the right racquet is essential, Mike believes that proper tennis shoes are the single most important piece of equipment for beginners. Quality tennis shoes provide stability, protecting the ankles with support for lateral and forward movement, unlike regular running shoes, which are designed mainly for forward motion and often have thicker soles.

Mike also advises beginners to focus on their development step-by-step, as gradual improvement is key to a successful tennis journey.

Caitlin and Mike
at the ASB Classic
2024



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