

ILTSC

ILKLEY LAWN TENNIS & SQUASH CLUB

Eight hours into the 11 hour flight to Mexico City, I was wondering why we didn't upgrade our seats for extra legroom . With 10 days of tennis at altitude and temperatures reaching 34 degrees ,we need all the help we can get! A crazily busy taxi drive to the hotel through downtown Mexico City followed, which made the drive down the M1 to Heathrow feel like a leisurely Sunday drive in the Dales. A fitful night sleep, due partly to the 7 hour time difference but also the excitement of playing some of the top over 60s mens players in the world maybe didn't help !

Day 1 Thursday Practice

We walked from the hotel to the Centro Deportivo Israelita club for the first practice day The walk through a maze of narrow bustling streets with market sellers was slightly intimidating but intriguing. We decided there and then not to try this walk after 9pm in the dark. After a very tight security check we entered a sports complex with an Olympic size swimming pool and diving boards, football pitches, pelota courts (maybe we need one for ILTSC!) and 16 clay tennis courts . Wow, an oasis of calm!

The GB team consisted of Gary Payton, Chris Hearn ,Alistair Alexander, and myself. A strong experienced squad that I was privileged to be a part of.

We soon realised that the hot temperature was going to be the least of our problems. Pressureless balls,2200m altitude,shortness of breath , 34 degrees , lack of sleep and the threat of Montezumas revenge were all going to be a challenge! How do tennis professionals play in this heat for 5 hours or more?

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Day 2 Friday Practice

The team had a breakfast meeting regarding the challenges of the week and how to overcome them. Rackets needed to be strung tighter, shots with extra topspin to control the ball needed to be perfected and gallons of bottled water were definitely required. After another 2 hours of practice the balls felt more controllable and we were starting to be (a little) more comfortable on the court.



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Day 3 Saturday Final Practice day and opening ceremony.

An early start at 9pm. A couple of hours of practice with drills, singles and doubles to acclimatise further. Then we moved to another area of the club for the opening ceremony with an extravaganza of dancing and musical entertainment and a gathering of all mens and ladies teams from around the world. The Mexican tennis federation didn't let us down!



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Day 4 Sunday First match vs Switzerland

All matches are tough in these conditions but the draw was reasonably kind to us . A resounding 3-0 start to our campaign with all players blooded and winning a rubber each. Also it happened to be my 60th. Quite a memorable day and not a drop of champagne was drunk! Honest!

Day 5 Monday Match vs Argentina

This was going to be our first major test. Clay court specialists and a team that were comfortable in the heat. We certainly weren't crying after a great performance by the whole team which concluded in another 3-0 win.

Day 6 Quarter final vs Italy.

A serious test against a very strong Italian team. The winners of this match would be guaranteed a medal so no pressure then! After 3 unbelievably tight matches we lost 3-0. Myself and Gary losing 10-8 in the final set tie break, this was one match that got away. At least we had a much deserved rest day to lick our wounds and fight for 5th-8th place .

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Day 8 Australia

The Ashes! Not only was there pressure of playing the first match but this match was also live streamed on the internet. I played some solid tennis with my opponent thankfully becoming more erratic as the match progressed. Knowing that my parents and daughters were watching the match back home spurred me onto a 6-3 6-1 win and a great start for the GB team. Our number one Chris had a tough match against the world number 3 losing comfortably but the doubles was a happier affair, so we won the match 2-1.



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Day 9 South Africa

So we were now battling for 5th place. After sharing the spoils in the singles, I played with Chris our captain in the pivotal doubles match against two huge Springbox that towered over us. Not a good idea to lob these two we concluded! After dominating the match from the start we won 6-3 6-4, with me serving out to win the tie and achieve 5th place. The mens 60s World championships was over for another year with USA defeating France in the final.

This concluded a fantastic week of high altitude and top attitude international tennis playing for GB. What a memorable experience. Personally I won 4 out of 5 matches. Now the training starts to try and get selected for the world championships next year. Who knows where that might take us!

