

SKIPTON TENNIS CENTRE

Case Study

Skipton Tennis Centre; Operating through a Pandemic

What did the first lockdown mean for Skipton Tennis Centre?

With the lockdown coming into force so abruptly, giving very little time for preparation, it was an extremely worrying time. Many of our coaches work on a self-employed basis and immediately the team lost 100% of their work. Tennis is a summer sport and being forced to close coming into the new season was very scary.

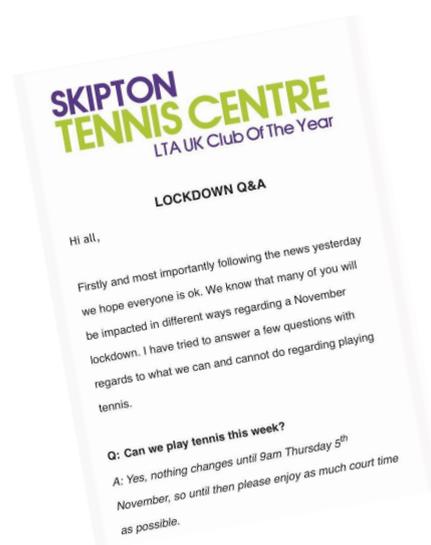
For many of our members and players in weekly coaching, tennis is a way of life, a way to meet friends, to socialise and to keep fit. For them it was also scary. Just when they needed the club the most, we were forced to close our doors.

How did Skipton Tennis Centre keep in touch and communicate?

We recognised from day one that good communication was going to be critical.

We set up a **weekly text and email** service to communicate quickly and effectively with players in the coaching programme and with club members. Social media was vital for staying in touch with the wider community.

We also supported our **local schools** with planning home PE learning via Microsoft Teams sessions and video skills. The environment was changing quickly, so communication was the single most important tool. The use of WhatsApp through the recent introduction of the new business button linked with Facebook has been key to our continued creative communicating.



What was done during the lockdown period?

After the initial shock and fear, that energy was channelled into excitement and focus. We did not waste a single minute.

We recognised this was time for progress and planning as we knew the day would come when the doors would open again. The club immediately started **supporting local schools** that were open as a hub for children of key workers by delivering 3 afternoons of sports for 17 consecutive weeks.



We had the foresight to see that the local leagues would not be running, so we created **intra club match play fixtures** for our members and designed our own match play league that was ready to go as soon as we were given the green light. This proved popular and saw approximately 32-40 fixtures per week and just over 600 fixtures over a 4-month cycle with 90 club players taking part, and every single fixture was planned during lockdown.

We **redesigned our whole summer holiday camp** to make it Covid secure and worked on multiple options as to what our weekly term time programme could look like.

Facility development is key to the future of tennis in Craven and beyond. As all who use the club know, it is our goal to build 3 indoor plexi-cushion courts. During lockdown, time was diverted to reviewing the operating model and completing the business plan required by the LTA. We also improved the existing facility with general maintenance, so our members had the best possible club to return to.



These are just a few examples of the team's work during this period, but the key was not to waste this valuable time and to be proactive.

What happened when the courts opened?

As soon as the courts opened, we were ready to welcome people back to the club.

We operated a phased start in line with Government guidelines. In **phase one**, people from different households could play singles. In **phase two**, doubles and match play were introduced. And in **phase three**, group coaching returned.

This process worked perfectly; all our users had confidence in our systems.



By mid-July we were ready to deliver our **holiday clubs** and numbers were very close to pre-Covid levels with 72 children per day taking part for 7 consecutive weeks. The sessions were set up in 6 pods of 12 and the hard work to plan these clubs was done during lockdown. This made the delivery easy, as we had all the processes in place.

By September, our **weekly coaching programme** was busier than ever, and we had just delivered a holiday club in which 500 different children had taken part. Everything was delivered safely, and we adhered to all Government guidelines. Over the summer we also saw more adults than ever playing tennis through pay and play, match play, social tennis, and group coaching.

What does Skipton Tennis Centre consider key to success during a pandemic?



Not just in a pandemic, but in any year, communication and organisation are critical.

Being creative and proactive is very important as the environment is constantly changing. Above all else **our ethos is to allow people to try, learn, play, and enjoy tennis in a safe and accessible environment.** Our team works incredibly hard to make sure what we offer is open and accessible to everyone.

Being engaged with the **community** is also very important for any sports club to thrive.

What has Skipton Tennis Centre done this year to promote tennis and make it open and accessible?

The team at STC is constantly looking at ways to be positive in the community and this year was no different but included some extra lateral thinking.

- Back in May we provided 30-minute hits with a coach to help build confidence and get people back on court.
- Fifty rackets were lent to children to enable home practice.
- We supported a hub school for key workers 3 days per week.
- We gave away 20 holiday camp days to children and families who needed support.
- 'Golden tickets' were distributed to schools enabling children to come and try free taster sessions.
- And in December, one week of coaching and court hire will be FREE to anyone who wants to access the club.

Top tips whilst operating through a pandemic?

*As we previously said, **communication, creativity and organisation** are imperative.*

As well as this we have tried to remain positive and be the one thing that can remain as normal as possible for our community amid the fear and uncertainty.

We have tried to recognise that people are nervous and worried and show empathy as we know people have been affected in many ways by the impact of Coronavirus.

Although we too have been impacted, we have not let this affect anyone's experience while using Skipton Tennis Centre. We have aimed to be a place of sanctuary and positivity.

Can we take away any positives?

We have developed new ways to communicate and operate that are more efficient than ever before.

Our links with local schools are stronger than ever and more new people have accessed the tennis courts at Skipton than in any other year. We have also invested heavily in the facility with new fencing, and we have solidified the business plan for our future facility development plans.

Above all else, we feel that our members, and players who use the club, have become more socially connected than ever before and have really felt the benefits of being part of such an inclusive, open and accessible facility.

Stand of facts of 2020 for STC

- 650+ players in holiday clubs.
- 17 schools in our community outreach network work.
- 310 players have taken part in our weekly club programmes.
- 90 adults/juniors per week involved in our intra club match play.
- 1,020 players have played weekly tennis across 17 schools.
- Our virtual competition in collaboration with Bradford Grammar School had an average of 300 views daily on Facebook. The competition was an online event to replace our annual tournament.
- More 'pay and play' visitors than any previous year.
- Free tennis to families who will struggle to access the sport without this support.
- £31k re-invested back into facility development, including brand new perimeter fence.

An insight on what Skipton Tennis centre has meant to a club member ...

Sarah joined the club 10 years ago having always wanted to play tennis.

As an adult learner she has progressed from group coaching through to playing in the leagues, and the club has always been more than just a sports facility to her. As an active member normally playing socially several times a week and in all seasons, the isolation of lockdown was hard.

When Government guidelines allowed tennis as one of the first sports to re-start this provided enormous relief for both her physical and mental well-being. As well as the chance to get active, play a sport she loved and meet safely with good friends, the club offered a beacon of normality while keeping her secure and confident in returning.

She commented that it is no exaggeration to say that without the warm and familiar welcome of STC after 2 months of isolation as a solo household, her mental health would have taken even more of a jolt and the club has played a key role in getting her through this difficult year.

