

From the Archives

Centenary anniversary for Japanese tennis at Roehampton Club

This year marks the centenary of the Japanese Tennis Association. Against this background, it seems appropriate to remind the tennis world of the visit of Ichijia Kumagae to Roehampton Club 100 years ago this month.

Kumagae was best known for his two Olympic silver medals at the 1920 Antwerp Olympics making him the recipient of the first Olympic medals won by any Japanese athlete. In the men's singles final, Kumagae lost to South African Louis Raymond 7–5, 4–6, 5–7, 4–6. Playing with his partner, Seiichiro Kashio in the final of the doubles event, he lost 2–6, 7–5, 5–7, 5–7 to Oswald Turnbull and Maxwell Woosnam of Great Britain.



Kumagae was also Japan's first ever Davis Cup Captain. His visit to Roehampton Club was reported in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 14th January 1922 by Alfred Ernest Beamish who has featured previously in the Roehampton Club newsletter as a local resident of Richmond with his own reputation as an accomplished tennis player in the game. The newspaper article refers to several matches played against a selection of our Members in which Kumagae proved too strong for the opposition.

While he saw fit to visit the Club in the knowledge of the quality of our courts and our associations with the Wimbledon Championships, Kumagae was here in the UK for business purposes with several other businessmen to study our methods of passenger transportation. The article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* refers to the use of his spare time in the UK with his colleagues going sight-seeing in the metropolis. It seems that Kumagae and his associates were enamoured by the spectacle of our city policemen regulating the traffic. He and his fellow countrymen were also apparently surprised at the politeness of the motorbus which they remarked upon as a 'novel phenomenon in London'. The author of the newspaper article saw this a remarkable compliment from a nation well-known for its politeness and its cardinal virtues.



During his time at Roehampton Club and his conversations with the journalist, Kumagae brought news of another celebrated tennis player from Japan, Zenzo Shimizu, who had made his name in the 1920 Wimbledon Championships by reaching the All-Comers Final where he lost to Bill Tilden 4-6, 6-4, 11-13. He played again at Wimbledon the following year losing in the semi-final to Michael Alonso in five sets. Like Kumagae, he was also a member of Japan's Davis Cup Team. Finishing his references to the celebrated Japanese tennis players linked to the Club, the author of the article goes on to make comment on the use of 'hard' tennis courts during the winter months and his frustration at this surface lacking in frost resistant qualities. If only he was here today to see for himself the variety of surfaces now available to play tennis whatever the weather. Getting back to the heritage of our links with Japanese tennis, the Club can be justifiably proud of its association with the Centenary event this year.