

Author Anne Wainscott-Sargent and husband Jeff at Centre Court at Wimbledon.



EXPERIENCING WIMBLEDON

Through ALTA Eyes

By Anne Wainscott-Sargent

My husband, Jeff, and I are not unlike other ALTA couples—we LOVE tennis—watching it, playing it, talking about it. We met at a round robin in Atlanta almost five years ago and got engaged at the 2003 U.S. Open. Our wedding that December at Primrose Cottage in Roswell even included a “tennis sports bar” at the reception.

This year, we joined 16 fellow Atlanta tennis enthusiasts on a trip of a lifetime—

to Wimbledon, home of The Championships at The All England Club. The trip didn’t disappoint—we had sunny, clear skies all three days we were there the opening week.

This was my first Wimbledon, and I couldn’t help contrast it to my experiences attending the U.S. Open, with its boisterous crowds, frequent airplanes flying overhead and the nose-bleed seats of Arthur Ashe Stadium. Both venues offer some fabulous outside court action, but for the main headline matches, there

is nothing like the intimacy of sitting at Centre Court. Leave your binoculars behind; there is no “bad seat.”

I will never forget the stunning green, manicured grass courts. According to The Championships spokesperson Johnny Perkins, who I interviewed the Saturday before play began, head groundsman Eddie Seaward is one of the most quoted people behind the scenes. “His job is pretty fundamental—no grass, no tournament. You could probably run the tournament without the rest of us, but without him,

we'd be in trouble," Perkins says.

The special pride and respect the sport holds for the English was ever-present at Wimbledon. I saw married couples, a grandmother with her grandson, businessmen and royals alike.

**GOING TO WIMBLEDON—
'AN OCCASION'**

"Going to Wimbledon is an occasion," said one woman I sat next to at Centre Court on opening day, explaining why so many of the English don their Sunday best—gentlemen (even youngsters) in ties and coats, ladies in heels and dresses. For the "members" of the All England Club, you have to dress your best to gain entrance to the member-only areas of the Club.

And, who can forget the service stewards from the U.K. Armed Forces and London Fire Brigade, who have served at The Championships since World War II? One such volunteer, a Navy photographer named Brett, told me it was his first time seeing professional tennis. "It's been excellent—I'm most impressed with

the ability and dedication of the athletes. They put a lot of hard work into their sport. It's amazing."

London did not live up to its reputation for inclement weather, though. "The weather's been fantastic. All of us from Atlanta brought some nice weather to London," says Jonathan Lockeretz, an English expat and tennis pro living in Marietta, in his third year running the Wimbledon trip through his company, The Grass Court Experience. This year was his largest group to date; last year's trip goers weren't as lucky and had to deal with 10 days of rain.

"To see the reverence the people of England hold for Wimbledon was incredible—you really sense how knowledgeable the Brits are about their tennis," says Dave Dvorak, director of tennis at Dunwoody Country Club, who made his first trip to Wimbledon with his new wife, Gina. The trip was a going-away present from the tennis-playing members of Atlanta Country Club, where Dvorak worked from 1992 through 2005. "On

Andre Hames, who plays out of Suwanee Station, enjoying a grass court round robin at Surbiton Racquet & Fitness Club near Wimbledon.



Centre Court, when there is an unforced error you can hear a pin drop, but for a forced error or a winner, you hear a great amount of applause," he adds.

For many of us, major spectator highlights included the match between Serbia's Ana Ivanovic and France's Nathalie Dechy. Nathalie almost upset the **CONT. ON PG. 34**

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There's More to London Than Wimbledon

You've enjoyed Wimbledon—now you're ready to experience London. Getting around is easy. Unlike Atlantans, Londoners aren't limited by a two-county train system. The London Underground, the National Rail System, the many double-decker buses and taxis make getting around easy to see attractions like:

THE LONDON EYE Atlanta may be home to the world's largest aquarium—but London has Europe's largest Ferris wheel. If you can stand the queue lines, you are treated to a 30-minute ride featuring a breathtaking, 360-degree vista of all of London.

LONDON'S THEATER DISTRICT Atlanta has the Fox; London has the Apollo near Victoria Station, where friends and I took in a production of "Wicked," the story of the witches of Oz.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY You need two to three hours to adequately experience this Gothic monastery church where English monarchs were coronated and buried. I liked the tombs of Elizabeth I and her half sister Queen Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary), the open-air Cloisters Room and the Poet's Corner.

SHOPPING & TEA AT HARRODS For Phipps Plaza and Lenox devotees, Harrods is another dimension of shopping nirvana—but be prepared to spend. The designer label women's clothes my friends saw cost hundreds of pounds. Harrods' idea of a food court includes a sushi bar and a global complement of gourmet cuisine. Glimpse at the Princess Diana/Dodi Fayed memorial in the lower level, before heading to the Georgian Restaurant to experience a traditional afternoon tea.

THE TOWER OF LONDON This is where three of Henry VIII's wives were beheaded, and also where the crown jewels reside. Besides a place for imprisonment and death, it's also where some Brits marry (we witnessed a bridal party's arrival the day we toured—Rhodes Castle in Midtown, this is NOT!).

HAMPTON COURT PALACE In close proximity to Southwest London, right off the Thames and one stop from where we stayed in Kingston, this historic palace built by Henry VIII for Anne Boleyn, features 60 acres of beautifully maintained gardens and a split personality (half was redesigned 350 years later by William II).

CHURCHILL MUSEUM & CABINET WAR ROOMS Atlanta has its share of history buffs. If you are one of them don't miss this tribute to England's most celebrated prime minister. In these tight quarters, Churchill and his government met as bombs rained down on London in 1940.

COVENT GARDEN People watchers head to this former flower market—it is the Little Five Points of London—with its open-air cafés, restaurants, pubs and market stalls. We were entertained by a Cirque de Soleil-style acrobat and annoyed by a Goth guy in a pink tutu infuriating a folk artist as he illegally photographed her work.

For those feeling really energetic, like David and Gina Dvorak from our group, consider a day trip to Paris on the EuroStar Chunnel. Whatever your time and interests, London offers something for everyone.

—Anne Wainscott-Sargent

world's No. 1 by playing flawless tennis, but Ivanovic fought off two match points to win 10-8 in a third set tiebreaker.

"I thought Ana did lose—when she hit that match point in the second set into the net—I thought the ball was going to fall on her side. When it bounced over, I was amazed," recalls Dvorak.

BRITS ROOTING FOR ONE OF THEIR OWN

Jeff and I saw firsthand how hard the Brits root for one of their own. On Tuesday evening, we headed to Court 3 where the Williams sisters were scheduled to play doubles for the fifth and final match of the evening. England's Chris Eaton, ranked 661 and the draw's lowest-ranked player, had other ideas. The 20-year-old qualifier wowed the crowd with his serve and volley winners, upsetting Serbia's Boris Pachanski in four sets. Many on Centre Court could hear the crowd cheering Eaton to victory. We happened to be sitting next to close friends of the Eaton family, Sue Jackson, a resident of Surrey, and her daughter, Rebecca, who had camped out on Court 3 all day to ensure a front-row seat.

"I've known Chris' parents for more than 30 years. I love what he's doing," says Sue, wearing the same pink body warmer and matching scarf that she wore to his three qualifying matches for Wimbledon. "I'm real excited and impressed with the way he's not over-awed by the occasion," adds Rebecca, of all the bystanders and media attention being given to his match.

Third-time trip veteran Robert Burns, an Atlanta periodontist with an encyclopedic knowledge of the game, especially enjoyed the Andy Murray-Fabrice Santoro first-round match. "It was absolute artistry—what these guys can do with a racquet. You've got Fabrice Santoro, who is the master of touch tennis, and Andy Murray, who has such great hands—the points were just beautiful to watch."

A small group of us briefly met Atlanta's own Robbie Ginepri at a house in Wimbledon Village that his sports management agency, Octagon Sports, rented out for the fortnight. "It was great to see him play at Wimbledon—he does own my club so that was very cool," says Constance Higgins, a pediatric pharmacist who plays on an A-1 ALTA team at Olde Towne Athletic Club.



Kennesaw's Robby Ginepri, second from left, takes time during a break at Wimbledon to have fun with Constance Higgins, Anne Wainscott-Sargent, Jonathan Lockeretz and Robert Burns.

PLAYING ON GRASS

Our love affair with grass court tennis didn't end with Wimbledon. As part of the trip, our group became honorary members of the Surbiton Racquet and Fitness Club, England's second oldest grass court club. For most of us, it was our first time on the grass. We battled some wind, but the surface was easy on our bodies and the hours went by quickly.

"Even though I grew up playing on grass, it's a luxury for me to come home and play—it feels so luxurious; it's the ultimate surface," says Lockeretz, who arranged a round robin between the Atlanta players, club members and a group from Chicago.

"It was truly a unique experience—not everyone who picks up a phone seeking a trip to Wimbledon gets the chance to play grass court tennis," says Higgins, an avid traveler who counts London as her favorite city to visit.

Adds Dvorak, who previously played in a grass tournament in Philadelphia, "You get to use different types of shots, under spin and slicers, and that's just fun—they are so effective on the grass."

The Surbiton club was where we gathered for drinks and to get to know one another. It also has historical significance to the game of tennis, serving as the site for the Surrey Grass Court Championships, a warm-up tournament for Wimbledon since 1946. On the day of our round robin, I met one of the club's most revered members, BBC Sports commentator Judy (Tagart) Dalton of Australia.

"I spent many happy hours here," says Dalton, who first played at Surbiton in 1962, and won the tournament's singles title twice and doubles title once. A 1968 women's finalist at Wimbledon, Dalton is one of the original eight who started the women's tour. She played against tennis greats Margaret Court and Billie Jean King, and remains close friends with Billie Jean.

"She did a huge amount for the game. Tennis has changed a lot—when I played the final at Wimbledon 40 years ago, that was the first time where women got prize money—even then we women were not acknowledged. I was not allowed to accept it by our tennis association," she recalls, noting that the tide really changed after Billie played Bobby Riggs. "That was when women's tennis really took off," she says.

HEADING HOME

It was an incredible trip—and not one we will soon forget. Coming home, Jeff and I, like everyone else in the tennis world, were glued to our seats, watching the five-set, nail biter men's final between Federer and Nadal that took seven hours to complete as darkness fell on Centre Court.

For us, watching Wimbledon on TV will never be the same—because we were a part of the magic of that most revered of tennis destinations—what Dvorak's friends at Atlanta Country Club appropriately call the 'Holy Grail' of tennis. ●

Anne Wainscott-Sargent is an enthusiastic member of a East Roswell Park Sunday Women's A-2 team.

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