

Kingfisher club ready to fly in new premises

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The opening ceremony is performed by (from left) Mandy Sainsbury, UllaKarin Clark, Matthew Syed and Alison Broe. Former England junior champion Mandy recently broke a leg and is currently in a wheelchair. (Picture courtesy of John Upham)

Former Commonwealth champion Matthew Syed was back where it all started as Kingfisher TTC officially opened their new £320,000 headquarters, which was part funded by Table Tennis England.

The club, based in Woodley, Reading, have moved into a purpose-built facility on the grounds of Bulmershe School.

Their previous HQ on the same site was demolished and the new centre built as part of a £6million scheme to renovate the school.

Sport England, through Table Tennis England, provided funds of just over £70,000 to help finance the scheme, with £250,000 coming from Wokingham Borough Council.

The HQ has space for four competition tables, or six for training, plus improved changing rooms, storage and better spectator amenities including a more accessible social area and viewing galleries.

Special guests at the opening ceremony included former England No 1 Syed, who is now an author and journalist. Syed came through the ranks of the club in its previous guise as the Omega Club and went on to become Commonwealth champion. Guests were shown footage of a TV interview with Syed as a teenager, filmed inside the Omega Club's dilapidated base.

The four-time national men's singles champion recalled of the premises: "In the summer, if it was hot outside, Omega Club was always five degrees hotter. But in the winter it was so cold that you often felt you wanted to go outside to warm up!"

Syed certainly warmed to the new building, saying: "This is a terrific facility, well lit, with good head clearance and flooring.

"But much more important are the people in the building. Success, however defined and in whatever field, is the product of teamwork."

Syed helped Wokingham Borough Mayor Cllr UllaKarin Clark to cut the ribbon to declare the site open, alongside club members Mandy Sainsbury and Alison Broe, who themselves had helped to open the previous clubhouse on the school site in 1984.

In a quirk of fate, the 1984 ceremony was presided over by England's last world champion Johnny Leach, whose funeral took place on the same day the new clubhouse was opened.

Table Tennis England Chair Sandra Deaton was attending the funeral, but sent a message to Kingfisher. In it, she said: "The new facility will give the opportunity to increase participation, widen the talent base and produce even more performance-level players.

"I have every confidence the facility will be a key factor in the future success, but please make no mistake, the main input is the dedication of all the volunteers involved in the club."

As well as club members, the centre will be used by students at the school as part of their sports curriculum, and Cllr Clark added: "It will benefit not just the students here but the whole community."

Some of the club's 190 members staged a display of their skills on two tables, and are already revelling in their

new surroundings.

Teenage star Maria Tsaptsinos said: "It's a big difference – the floor is much better, and the ceiling is higher. It's really nice to practise in and it's great that it's a 24-hour facility."

Josh Gallen, aged 15, said: "I think it's really good. The flooring is specialist table tennis flooring and the light is really good. It being open all the time means I can come to train whenever I want, which is going to help me improve."

Peter Charters, president at Kingfisher, said; "In the past, many of the country's best players chose to practise at Kingfisher because of its availability as a full-time table tennis venue. Now we hope they will also come because of our superior playing facilities.

"We will continue to work with local schools through curriculum activity, after-school clubs and coaching to ensure this area continues to punch above its weight in developing new table tennis champions."

[Click here](#) for more photos from the opening ceremony.

By Paul Stimpson (June 23rd, 2014)

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