

Winning ways for Wimbledon

AS the world's greatest tennis tournament gets under way, a former Sunderland tennis professional has launched his own unique insider's guide on just what it takes to make a Wimbledon champion.

Martin Baldrige's book *So You Want to Win Wimbledon?* amounts to a "How To" manual for budding young stars and their parents.

It alerts them to the pitfalls and practicalities along the way, but also gives advice and support and analyses exactly what it is that has made champions of players over the years, what they share in common and what sets them apart.

The 48-year-old former Southmoor School pupil has been in and around the professional tennis circuit in Britain, Europe and the U.S. for more than three decades now and was keen to pass on the sporting knowledge picked up over those 30 years.

Martin played professionally in the 80s after winning a tennis and academic scholarship at the age of 18 to study at the State University of Pennsylvania in the U.S.

During his playing career, Martin played against top names such as Jeremy Bates, a young Tim Henman, right, and former Wimbledon doubles champion Frew McMillan, before moving into coaching in the early 90s.



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But what started out as observations on the game soon hardened into a guide to what is needed for success.

He told the Echo: "I began writing the book about five years ago and originally it was just going to be my own thoughts on how to teach tennis.

"But then it turned into something much more comprehensive as I began to realise that most people are more interested in the big question - 'How do you win Wimbledon?'

"There is no simple, short answer to that question and sadly in the UK there are a lot of things going against a budding young player, arguably even more so if you're from the North East.

"There is a lack of opportunity to play in this country and despite the fact that we invented the sport, there's a real lack of tennis heritage, with no world number one since 1936!

"And on top of that there is a prevailing culture in this country that tennis is for the middle and upper classes. After our number one sport,

football, tennis comes a long way down the pecking order in terms of accessible sports.

"Across countries like France, Spain, Germany and more recently Italy, tennis is accessible and it is not just the weather that is a factor.

"There is a different culture where tennis is concerned, with small clubs at every level offering it and a feeling that it is something people of all abilities can do for fun, with whole families getting involved.

"For example, Roger Federer played from the age of eight as his family all played.

"As soon as he showed potential, he joined a top tennis club in Basle, Switzerland. But most importantly, he had his family behind him.

"In most cases successful players have a tennis playing family pushing and encouraging them along, with access to facilities and quality coaching.

"In many ways the book is a parenting guide on how to 'make' a top 100 tennis player."

The book is divided into five chapters, or sets: Are Wimbledon champions born or made?; Inside the world's top 100; So you want your kid to win Wimbledon?; The road to Junior Wimbledon and The Road to Wimbledon.

Along the way, it covers every aspect of young players' development, the best way parents can help, an analysis of the advice of dozens of top coaches, as well as his own and an examination of the make-up and making up of the players who have graced the top 100 over the years.

Martin said: "I think it's hard when kids first start out and parents too for that matter.

"They're expected to know what's



YOUNG HOPEFUL: Martin Baldrige when he took up a U.S. tennis scholarship at the age of 18. Top left, his new book.

best for their child when they start showing a talent at the sport, but the more help and guidance they can get the better.

"I hope the book helps in that direction, but it's so much more than that.

"I'd like to think it's a good book for any budding young player to read to help inform and maybe inspire.

"It's also a good book for anyone to read who is remotely interested

in tennis because it's a sport that fascinates so many.

"I'd like to think it gives an insight into what happens behind the scenes, what happens abroad and what happens at every stage of a tennis player's development."

★ Martin's eBook *So you want to win Wimbledon?* is available via the Amazon Kindle store for £6.89. More details at www.soyouwanttowinwimbledon.com



Swapping courts for keyboards to pass on his expertise

WEARISIDE'S Martin Baldrige is focusing on developing a budding career as a tennis writer having previously experienced the playing and coaching side of the game.

The 48-year-old, who first picked up a tennis racket aged 11 when he started at Southmoor School in Sunderland, has settled back in the North East after spending most of his early adult years abroad and on the professional tennis circuit.

And having recently returned from a trip to the Monte Carlo Open as a freelance tennis writer covering games involving Djokovic, Federer, Rafa and Murray as they got their 2011 clay court campaign under way leading to the French Open, he is now looking to promote his eBook *So You Want to Win Wimbledon*.

Martin was 18 when he went to study in the U.S.

"It changed my life," he told the Echo. "It broadened my horizons, enabled me to concentrate on my tennis and opened up the world to me.

"Tennis was my life. I would train as a student and then support myself through part-time coaching, even when I was still a teenager."

The young Sunderland man's scholarship was reward for a rapid rise up the country's junior tennis ranks which marked him out as a potential professional.

"We used to train at Pennywell Comprehensive School via the Green Shields Tennis Coaching programme, which was run by St Aidan's school teacher and tennis

coach John Weston.

"I progressed to the point where I became Durham and Cleveland County Champion and was ranked among the top 20 juniors in Great Britain from the age of 16 onwards.

"Then came the opportunity to apply for the scholarship.

"A friend who I played and trained with had already secured a scholarship and told me there may be an extra place.

"I thought nothing more about it until I got a phone call saying there was a place if I wanted to go for it!

"I was given coaching, free tuition and free accommodation and it was fantastic for me."

After the U.S, Martin made the move to France to play professionally, as there were more tournaments backed by prize money, as well as facilities for



QUICK RETURN: Martin Baldrige in action in the 1980s.

touring players.

He said: "When I stopped playing professionally I moved into coaching, working my way up the scale to the point where I now have Lawn Tennis Association Master Performance Coach status, which is pretty much as high as you can go.

"Over the years I've taught at many of the largest clubs in the North East, including the David Lloyd Club in Gosforth, Puma Centre Sunderland, Esports Club at Sunderland and I was also the Head Tennis Coach for Durham University.

"For the moment, though, I'm concentrating on publicising my book because I want to pass on the benefits to others of everything I've learned in the game so far."