



## Press Release

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### **REIGNING CHAMPIONS AND INTERNATIONAL MEDALLISTS HEAD ENTRIES AS NATIONAL DEAF TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS RETURN TO NATIONAL TENNIS CENTRE**

Reigning champions and World Championships medallists Esah Hayat, Lewis Fletcher and Phoebe Suthers join former champion Peter Willcox among the leading entries for the LTA's National Deaf Tennis Championships, which take place at the National Tennis Centre this weekend, 26 and 27 September.

With singles, doubles, mixed doubles and junior titles to be decided during the behind-closed-doors event, Hayat and Willcox are the top two seeds for the men's singles, having shared the National title between them since 2016. Willcox claimed his 13th National title in 2018 before Hayat won his second title in four years in 2019.

East Finchley 18-year-old Hayat, a silver medallist alongside doubles partner Fletcher at both the World Deaf Tennis Team Championships in 2018 and the second World Deaf Tennis Championships for individual competition in 2019, said:

*"After the excitement of winning senior and junior medals at the last two World Championship events, but then the disappointment of not being able to play the European Championships this summer, I'm really excited to get back to playing at the National Deaf Championships and trying to defend my singles title and the doubles title with Lewis as we work towards next year's Deaflympics.*

*"I played my first hearing event since lockdown last weekend, winning a men's doubles Grade 4 event in West London. So it's going to be great to be competing with my peers in deaf tennis again."*



Yorkshire 17-year-old Suthers will bid for her fourth women's singles National title as she also returns to deaf tennis competition for the first time since partnering Hayat and Fletcher to junior and senior mixed doubles gold and silver medals at last October's World Deaf Tennis Championships in Turkey. Suthers will have Middlesex's Valerie Copenhagen on the other side of the net in her bid for singles and mixed doubles titles.

Claire McCulloch, the LTA's Tournament Director for the National Deaf Tennis Championships said:

*"After what has been a very challenging period for our sport we are delighted to be able to stage the 2020 National Deaf Tennis Championships, providing our elite players with the opportunity to compete for the coveted National titles, while also giving some of our younger players the chance to continue their development by contesting both senior and junior events."*

The National Deaf Tennis Championships is part of the LTA's strategy of returning to domestic and elite competition, with members of the Great Britain Deaf Tennis now working towards next year's Deaflympics after the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the European Deaf Tennis Championships, which was due to be held in Germany in the last week of July.

While many deaf players compete successfully in hearing competition, the National Deaf Championships allows them to compete on a level-playing field against their peers, as all players must remove their hearing aids before playing in deaf competition.

Great Britain continues to be one of the leading nations in the world for deaf tennis, and disability tennis more broadly, helping to inspire a record number of disabled people to pick up a racket and enjoy tennis at a grassroots level. Last year, Great Britain was the only nation in the world to win trophies and medals at all four of the major international tennis tournaments covering deaf tennis, wheelchair tennis, visually impaired tennis and learning disability tennis, while the LTA's Open Court disability tennis grassroots programme is now one of the largest of its kind across any sport.

The programme supports over 500 venues across the UK to deliver disability specific sessions including learning disability, wheelchair, visually impaired and deaf tennis. The programme is funded by Sport England and the LTA and delivered at a local level.



Play at the 2020 National Deaf Tennis Championships is set to begin at 11am on Saturday, 26 September.

For news and updates during the National Championships follow on Twitter @LTACompetitions and on Facebook at facebook.com/BritishDeafTennis/.

**To find out more about the LTA's work with disability tennis, head to [www.lta.org.uk/play](http://www.lta.org.uk/play) or email [disabilitytennis@lta.org.uk](mailto:disabilitytennis@lta.org.uk).**

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- Please credit attached photos to the LTA.

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

#### **ABOUT THE LTA:**

The LTA is the National Governing Body of tennis for Great Britain. We are here to govern and grow tennis, from grassroots participation through to the professional game. Our vision is "Tennis Opened Up" and we're on a mission to grow tennis by making it relevant, accessible, welcoming and enjoyable. We work with schools, with volunteers, with coaches and with venues across the whole country. We also represent the interests of over 685,000 Members, men and women, girls and boys, playing on more than 23,000 courts. The LTA runs and supports a network of 11,500 approved tournaments for players of all ages, the four corner-stones of which are the premier grass-court events leading up to The Championships, Wimbledon: the Nature Valley Open (at Nottingham), the Nature Valley Classic (at Birmingham), the Fever-Tree Championships (at The Queen's Club, London) and the Nature Valley International (at Eastbourne). For further information about the LTA and tennis in Britain, visit [www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk) or follow us on Twitter @the\_LTA.

