

H Opportunity and Accessibility: Two Essential Elements Required for Ensuring Sport Is Woven Into the Very Fabric of All Our Children's Lives

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- Election year is always a time to reflect on where we are as a country and on the things that really matter to us. What do we care about? And what can be done to make things better. As a sportsman and now as a father, I have always believed passionately in the power of sport to improve the lives of young people. I know from my own personal experience and from the achievements of the thousands of youngsters I have encountered throughout my professional tennis career, that sport has transformative qualities. This is not just in terms athletic prowess and increased fitness but in teaching the life skills so vital to our children fulfilling their potential, These include commitment, leadership, making friends, initiative, understanding how to be healthy, building relationships, self belief, learning how to compete, responsibility... the list goes on.
- Despite promises made that London 2012 would be used to 'Inspire a Generation' and make sport more accessible to everybody, my heart sank when I read that the [Youth's Sports Trust](#) recently reported PE lessons in schools have dropped to below two hours a week. I have three young daughters and through them can see the draw of screen time. Getting them outside and involved in physical activities and playing games is really important.
- This week I am taking part in the annual [Andrew Reed Debate](#) at Guildhall in London, it is hosted by [Reed's School](#), the school I was fortunate to attend on a tennis scholarship. Reed's was founded in 1813 by social reformer and philanthropist [Rev Dr Andrew Reed](#) who was committed to improving the lives of orphans by giving them access to support, care and education, a tradition that the school continues to uphold through its bursary awards, tennis scholarship scheme and work with schools in disadvantaged areas and children's charities.
- The theme of this year's debate is the role of sport to help overcome deprivation and disadvantage amongst children. Sport is transformative in this area, I have experienced it first hand through my work with the [Wimbledon Junior Tennis Initiative](#) (WJTI) run by Wimbledon head coach Dan Bloxham, which for the past 13 years has taken tennis directly to young people by visiting them in their local schools and, for those that show keen interest, providing the opportunity of extra coaching at Wimbledon. About 165,000 children have now come through the programme and for many it would have been the first time they had ever held a racket.
- [HSBC Road to Wimbledon](#) is another longstanding initiative I have been involved with - 20,000 kids that play nationwide in their local schools, parks and clubs with the final played on grass at Wimbledon. This year we partnered with the [All India Tennis Association](#) (AITA) for the second year running with qualifying events taking place

now in four cities - Kolkata, Chandigarh, Delhi and Mumbai, followed by a Masters event in Delhi in April.

- By taking tennis directly to the children, these initiatives are providing what I believe to be the two key elements required if we are to successfully harness the power of sport to support disadvantaged young people - opportunity and accessibility. We must invest at grassroots level to ensure our young people have the means to find sport easily.... and prioritise sport in the lives of all of our young people.
- *Tim Henman is speaking at the second annual Andrew Reed Debate hosted by Reed's School on Thursday 5 February 2015, which this year is discussing how sport can change lives of disadvantaged children, for more information visit: andrewreeddebate.org*