

Ukrainian teenager shows real promise on tennis court

A Ukrainian teenager who has come to live in Edinburgh is showing his talent on the tennis courts.

Arsenii Opryshko is 13 and arrived in Scotland with the help of The Scottish Government's Super Sponsor scheme, along with his parents Vadim and Olga. The family are hosted by retired police sergeant, Mark McCool and his husband in Broomhouse.

Arsenii was a pupil at Gymnasium Number 13, a secondary school in Kharkiv. He holds a national ranking in his chosen sport of tennis and as a talented tennis player undertook three hours of tennis coaching per day.



Arsenii is currently a member at Hatton Sports Club, which has tennis, padel tennis, squash and racketball facilities and is situated on the A71 near Kirknewton. Caroline Newton, one of the committee members at Hatton, and a fellow Ukrainian host,

secured free membership of the club, with the cooperation of her fellow committee members.

Recently he has beaten other talented junior tennis players by winning the LTA Scotland Tour, Grade 5, Boys U16 event – coming first, which took place in Broughty Ferry and also came second in a similar event at Dalgety Bay on 14 October and more recently won the U16 boys event in Kelso.

Since 2016 Edinburgh Leisure has delivered their Relocated People Access programme in partnership with the The City of Edinburgh Council's Migration and Refugee Team. Through the project, Edinburgh Leisure give relocated people access cards, which allows them free use of their facilities for six months while they are settling into their new city. Edinburgh Leisure now supports around 2,000 people from countries around the world including Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Syria.

More recently the sports body has also started providing children who are new to the city with free use of their facilities, places on their children's sports coaching programmes and places on their holiday sports camps over the summer to help them enjoy the active childhood they deserve.



Realising his tennis talent, Mr McCool, along with the support of Mandy Fairnie, Operations Manager at Edinburgh Leisure's Craiglockhart Tennis Centre, has managed to secure coaching from various sources, including coaches at the Edinburgh

flagship tennis centre, and East of Scotland tennis clubs and through Tennis Scotland.

Mark said: "There's no doubting the tennis talent of this young lad, especially in taking the overall trophy for the Under 16 Boys Singles competition, when he is only 13 years. Yet it shouldn't be underestimated the hoops this family have had to through just to get to this stage.

"Like many of their fellow countrymen, none of them have chosen the journey they have all been on, but they are making the best of a bad situation. I'm so grateful to everyone that has supported the family so far to help progress their son's talent. But then again, participating in tennis doesn't come cheaply. And while everyone has given of their time freely until now, there are always the hidden costs associated at competing at such a level, including rackets, balls, shoes, entry costs etc."

HOLIDAY TURNS INTO EVACUATION

The family had left Ukraine to go on their first family holiday in three years to Egypt, a country they had been longing to visit for 10 years. It was a holiday that would combine rest and relaxation with a business opportunity that Vadym was developing and a business meeting with a new partner – not knowing that this would be the same week that Russia would invade Ukraine.

After the skies around their country were closed to all air traffic, the family were stranded in an Egyptian hotel with three suitcases full of summer clothes, sandals, and flip flops.

The family's circumstance was very quickly recognised by other guests in the hotel and those guests, all of whom were on holiday, clubbed together and funded one of the German families to take Vadym, Olga and Arsenii home with them to

southern Germany.

Before long Vadym, Olga and Arsenii found themselves surrounded by many Ukrainian refugee families who had themselves fled the regions worst hit by the Russian invasion.

In Germany, Vadym and Olga's personal and professional experience was quickly recognised by the German authorities and Vadym, a fluent English speaker was recruited into a refugee support position by the Mayor's office in the German village of Bad Schonborn, 80km from the city of Stuttgart. Olga meanwhile found herself working in, and ultimately running, an already established kitchen that was now feeding a wave of refugees, over and above their normal duties in providing for the existing community.

As Mark McCool explained: "Despite the magnitude of the developing situation, Vadym and Olga's main desire was to provide as normal a life as possible for their teenage son, which was made possible by the German community who quickly offered Arsenii a place in a school and who they also enrolled in a local tennis programme."


Arsenii

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Vadym Opryshko, father to Arsenii said: "As a family, we couldn't have asked for a more supportive welcome from so many different people in Edinburgh. Like any parents, we just want the best for our child and for Arsenii, it's to continue developing his natural tennis ability, despite the challenges we have experienced since leaving our homeland."

Concluding Mark McCool said: "My partner and I, along with so many other members of the local and tennis community have welcomed this displaced family into our hearts. Arsenii is one talented individual when it comes to playing tennis, and we couldn't be prouder of his achievements over the weekend.

"We just hope we can continue to find support to nurture his talent while he is a guest in Scotland."