

Back-to-back titles are a Turkey trot for James

East of Scotland tennis ace James MacKinlay is hoping to extend a doubles partnership with Derbyshire's Jay Clarke after the pair ended 2023 with back-to-back tournament wins in Antalya, Turkey.

What made the ATP Challenger events remarkable was not so much that it was James' breakthrough at this level.

Rather the pair came together in ad hoc circumstances.

James, 23, who has connections with Edinburgh's Barnton Park club, amongst others, explains:

"Jay put up an instagram story stating that these two weeks were his last two tournaments of the year and I happened to see this story and replied asking if he would be keen to play the week of the 11th December.

"As it was already Sunday of the week previous ...ever the opportunist I ended up flying out on the Monday morning after doing Christmas shopping the day before. It turned out to be a good decision to message him on the Sunday."

Although Jay had originally lined-up another partner the pair stayed together for the second leg of the Antalya mini circuit and distinguished themselves by taking out the top seeds 6-2, 6-1 in the semi-final.

They then went on to claim the crown with another straight-sets win.

But as for that breakthrough win in the first week of the partnership James says:

“It meant a lot to finally win as I’ve made a few finals before but haven’t been able to get over the line and in terms of ranking it will put me up to about 710 on the ATP rankings.

“I certainly feel like I have been putting in the off court work in order to be able to get this first title but would also have to say that sometimes when you’re playing you need a little bit of luck. But, overall, I have been playing well enough to win one of these titles for about five months

“I hope we are able to play (together) in the coming year.”

As for his journey so far, this former four time ITF junior tournament winner says: “There’s too many clubs to name but I started playing tennis at a local leisure centre in Crieff aged five and progressed through to Edinburgh aged 10. Barnton Park has always been the best club in the East.”

A representative of the East county team, James distinguished himself with the best points return for that team in Division One of the UK inter-county championship at Eastbourne in 2023.

Modestly playing down such statistics he says matches had a truncated format due to adverse weather.

“County week was very different year as it was ‘Fast 4’ format so it was practically a coin toss on who was going to win each rubber but I think Euan McIntosh and I did well considering” he says while looking forward to building on December successes.

Hopefully that will be with partner Jay who, in 2017, on a wildcard entry alongside Marcus Willis at Wimbledon, defeated the reigning men’s doubles holders Nicolas Mahut and Pierre

Hughes-Herbert.

Adds James:

“I start the year back at my training facility in Loughborough where there is a 25k event starting 7 January followed by one in Sunderland. So, I have a busy January and we’ll see what tournaments are available to play within reason and not too expensive!”



James MacKinlay, left, and Jay Clarke won back-to-back tennis tournaments in Turkey during December.



James MacKinlay, left, with short notice doubles partner, Jay Clarke.