

Emma and Olivia Allen



How did you get into tennis?

Emma: We moved to school in Naas and our parents wanted us to have an interest in a sport so we joined NTLC and started together at ages 9/10 years. We generally did most 'activities' together as there is only 12 months between us!! Luckily there was a great number of junior players when we joined so very quickly we were all involved in coaching and club tournaments. Many of those 'juniors' like ourselves are still playing 'senior' tennis for NLTC. There has always been a great 'spirit' in the club to play & participate and that continues right up to today!

Olivia: Our Dad won 2 rackets in a raffle and we started to hit in our front driveway. We joined Naas LTC soon afterwards and had group lessons with Helen Lennon organised by Mary Rose Lyons. We played club tournaments and at the age of 10 /11 we started to play the tournaments together. We played singles, doubles and mixed and when we played together we were known as E&O Allen. Enjoyed staying with tennis friends in their houses while playing tournaments. It was a great motivation to stay in the tournament because once you lost it was back to Naas. Our goal was always to make it to Fitzwilliam.

We didn't have much coaching as juniors but we had each other to practice. In our teens we attended one 3 hr group coaching session in Dublin weekly, where the focus was on technique, hitting and fitness.

At the age of 14 we started to play for Naas LTC in the Dublin Lawn Tennis Councils Summer League but we didn't play together initially, we were paired with more senior players in order to gain experience.

How many years have you been playing tennis together as a doubles partnership?

Emma: My first memory is U14– in club tournaments we were generally separated, but once we participated in Junior Open’s we played together – memories of Sutton, Malahide, Donnybrook & Fitzwilliam & E & O Allen were the doubles pairing from Naas. For one or two years I’m sure we had matching tracksuits to confuse everyone – most people thought we were twins!! All league tennis from Junior, Senior and Intermediate we have played together. Mary Rose Lyons also had a role in getting us there too – she always encouraged us to play together & keep an eye on all our performances!! A great lady that really did so much in keeping us playing and enjoying tennis!

Olivia: Nearly 40 years?? There were breaks when Emma studied in Jordanstown and also when I moved to Germany for 5 years. (I played league for TSV Jan Tennis Club in Munich - tennis is such a great sport to travel with, all you need is your racket, runners and an opponent. While living in Munich in was a great way of making friends).

Our doubles game has really improved 'with age', playing league has kept us playing tennis. Club support in terms of providing coaching sessions (focused on doubles tactics) really helped/motivated us to keep playing over the years.

Who is better at keeping their cool on court?

Emma: This is a tricky question – I’d say Olivia. She weighs everything up very quickly and then we decide on a plan (to be honest we know each other so well, that we can simply decide ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the plan!). We are also not afraid of long matches – just as well, because we’ve had our fair share of nail-biting battles over the years

Olivia: As a pair we generally don't really lose our 'cool' on court, althoughif Emma loses her cool I know we will win the match, she becomes so focused and determined, she tells me the game plan and I dare not make a mistake...I recall the senior league final where Emma turned to me during the first set and said I have only enough energy to play 2 sets here so lets win it in 2. This we did, I was more afraid of letting down my sister than losing the final. On rare occasions we may have a disagreement on court (usually regarding how to play our opponents) and lose our cool with each other, this is very challenging when it occurs, but one thing is for certain our opponents will never know that we are having a disagreement. We never leave the court on bad terms.

What’s your funniest/ favourite tennis memories?

Emma: Best memory - Getting up to Class 1 in Summer League & then to top it off by qualifying for Premier!! That was my highlight, although neither of us played, Olivia was injured and I was in the labour ward getting updates on an hourly basis on the team progress. The win was outstanding & the team on their way home provided me with a list of ‘possible’ names for my son....(none were chosen I’m afraid...but it was a colourful list!!)

Olivia: Semi-final Summer League match at home in Naas LTC, we were on court 3, playing against two fantastic juniors (from David Lloyd) who were about to take the first set when Mark Carpenter came out on court 4 to hit, well the two girls couldn't keep their eyes off him, lost concentration, we won the first set but knew we had to take the second set quickly before the two girls woke up!

Finishing a summer league match in Laytown Bettystown using the lights from our parked cars.

Being promoted to Class 1 Summer League and then to Premier in the subsequent year.

Having and maintaining 2 ladies teams in Class 1 Winter League.

What are the biggest lessons you have learned?

Emma: Never give up!!

Olivia: Over and in, is all you have to concentrate on when having a bad day on court....

Doubles is all about teamwork, communication is key, be responsible for your side of the court. Know your weaknesses, feed on your strengths.

If you have a 'niggle' during the match never tell your partner as it changes their focus.

Tennis is 10% physically demanding and 90% mentally demanding.

Never give up, nobody remembers how you won a match but everyone remembers who won!

Understand the important moments in a game/set when to concentrate or really give it your all.

Always look for ways to improve your game no matter what your age or ability.

Communicate with your partner, no matter how the match is going, you never know what can happen.

Make every minute count when practicing, you may only have 40 mins to hit, make every minute count.

What do you believe are the benefits of playing tennis / What has tennis given to you?

Emma: For me it is that everyone has a chance to win.... We have all played matches where 'clever' tactics won the match....

I really enjoy playing league tennis – building a team & everyone playing together to secure a win or hold your position – even in the worst of weather we all compete.

Friendships for life

Great sport to meet people – and you can play for an hour or two hours – single, doubles or mixed & you it is an international sport....great to play abroad & meet people via tennis.

Olivia: Friendships, fitness, fun, learning especially tactics for doubles, sense of club community, it makes you tough not just physically but also mentally.

Power of positive thinking is so important on court, not letting points lost, bad weather, your opponent's lucky shots in on you mentally.

Acknowledge good play, accept defeat, learn from your wins and defeats - it is after all only a game to be enjoyed!

Is there anything you would like to see more of to encourage more females to continue playing tennis into their twenties and beyond?

Emma: We were fortunate that the Senior Ladies helped us to keep playing – they placed us on teams which were pitched correctly at our level & possibly with another females of similar age. It helps keep the interest but to be honest, we weren't too keen on the practicing then. It is not easy as everyone has a lot on with college / jobs etc and tennis can get lost very easily! The club spirit is key in keeping players playing!!

Olivia: It's never too late to improve your game. Playing league is a great way of 'staying' in tennis.

Clubs should promote senior coaching - it's not just for juniors!

Tennis is a great sport for fitness and you can play in 'old-age'