

Wimbledon: Rain or Shine!

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are some great British summer traditions.

One of them is Wimbledon fortnight, when the top names in the tennis world head for a suburb of London for the only Grand Slam tournament to be held on a grass surface. Sadly another tradition is that once the fortnight gets underway, so does the rain. We've had years where Wimbledon has helped to end weeks of drought conditions. I was really hoping that this year would be different, as it was the first time in 11 years that I had managed to get tickets for the championship, although it's been compulsory television viewing in our house for a number of years.

Wimbledon is very different to most major sporting events in the way that the tickets allocated. A certain amount of tickets are available for the show courts - Centre Court, Number One and Number Two courts - on each day of the tournament via a public ballot (lottery). To be entered into this ballot, all you have to do is send in your details and a self-addressed envelope between the start of August and mid December. If you're successful, then you'll get notification in February or March, with details of the date and court that you've been allocated tickets for. You can then decide whether you want to take them or not and if you do, that's when you pay for them.

But what's unique about Wimbledon is that even if you don't strike it lucky in the ballot, there is still hope. Every day you can just turn up and queue for entry into the grounds and for the remaining tickets for the show courts. Realistically, if you want one of those show court tickets, you have to be there early. It's not uncommon for people to camp out overnight and the lines often stretch around the grounds, with thousands waiting and hoping to get in on the busiest days.

Fortunately we didn't have to go down this route, as we were lucky enough to be allocated top-priced tickets for Number One court for the first Saturday of the tournament. Of course, I eagerly accepted those and paid for them. It's not a cheap day out, but then, that applies to most major sporting tournaments. Besides, on a good day, you could easily enjoy ten hours of tennis.

It became fairly obvious though as the day dawned that there was no way we would be seeing that much action. The clouds greeted us with rain as we parked and that continued on and off throughout the morning. The gates usually open at 10:30 am and play will then begin on

the outside courts, numbers 3 through to 19, shortly afterwards at 11:00 am. If you've just got a ticket to get into the grounds and want to grab a seat to see the action on the outside courts, you'll need to move quickly. By the time we got past the very thorough security checks (a lot of places could learn from Wimbledon on that count!), a lot of the seats on court 13 were already taken. It's only that court and court 3 that have large amounts of seating. The others have very limited seats and mainly standing room only views.

When you first enter the grounds, the thing that strikes you is how close together the courts are. The outside courts are literally sandwiched together in two chunks to the north and south of Centre Court, some with literally only a few feet between them.

Speaking of Centre Court, it's in the middle of a very dramatic refurbishment, which will see the installation of a retractable roof by the 2009 tournament. This year there's no roof on the court at all, making for a potentially wet and windy spectator and playing experience. And that's exactly what we got on the day we were there. That rain was never far away and before long, we heard an announcement that first there would be no play until midday, then 1:00 pm and then 1:30 pm.

Fortunately, when it rains, there are lots of other things to see and do - of course, most of them cost you money! There are plenty of places to get food, although as you'd expect, the prices aren't cheap and when it rains, it's mobbed. The Wimbledon shop is another good way to ensure that you don't leave with the money you entered with, full of tempting items. Let's just say that the Wimbledon umbrella we bought was the best purchase we'd made in some time!

Finally we took our seats on Number One court and discovered that we really had lucked out with them. We were in the front row, about four seats along from where the players' coaches and families sit. We couldn't have wished for anything better, except for sunshine and dry weather.

We eventually got enough of a break in the rain to get the players on to court and we were treated to a first class match between number two seed Maria Sharapova and the number 26 seed Ai Sugayama. Although the score didn't reflect it, it was a close match and perhaps some of the most interesting things were the things you don't really notice when you watch TV coverage. It was quiet enough to hear a pin drop when either player served, which I never realized before, and to actually see the power and motion that goes into each serve really makes you admire their fitness levels. It looks like a very simple game to play, but there's a

great deal of technique, training and sheer power required to do it well.

As the match moved into its last game, the rain returned and as soon as the players shook hands, the ground staff were into place and hauling the covers safely back into place to protect the court from the rain. They make it look like an effortless operation and the speed at which they get the cover into place is staggering.

Sadly, from that point onwards, we saw no further play, but fortunately as we had only seen just over an hour's worth of play, we would receive half of our money back. This rain policy was introduced a few years ago and for those on Centre Court, the news was even better. With just 58 minutes play, as they had seen less than an hour of tennis, they would get a complete refund on the price of their tickets. It may sound generous, but let's not forget, with nothing to watch, we were all happily spending money inside the grounds!

Despite the rain, we will definitely be trying to get lucky in the Wimbledon ballot for the 2008 tournament. It's an experience I can thoroughly recommend, although I can't always promise good weather for your day out!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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