

The 2015 Neptune British Open Real Tennis Junior Singles Championships were held at the Queen's Club in London between August 21-23, with nearly 50 competitors entered into the U12, U14, U16 and U18 flights. Prince's Court's Erik Barker, playing in the U16 division, was the sole attendee this year from the States.

The U16 field was quite deep this year, with four competitors handicapped between 30 and 37. In the final round robin division, Barker squared off against Nick Milton, Vaughn Hamilton and Henry Stevinson. Milton was a U16 finalist last year, and had won the U14 division two years ago. He made the trip earlier this summer to play in the US juniors, entering in the U17 and U19 divisions, and lost in the U19 finals to Barker at Newport in July.

In the round robin featuring one six game set, Barker beat Milton, but lost to Hamilton (6-2), with Milton beating Hamilton creating a three way tie of competitors with a 2-1 record, as all were successful against Stevinson. Milton was unlucky to lose the most-games-won tiebreaker (15 to 14 to 13), and thus just missed out on finishing in the top two.

The final was highly competitive, with Barker getting off to a quick start and a 4-1, 40-15 lead. Hamilton fought back to even the set at 4-4, relying on a consistent and deadly two-handed cross-court backhand from the service side which reliably found the tambour. After regaining the lead at 5-4, Barker was fortunate on set point to have Hamilton finally miss a cross-court backhand, and took the first set 6-4. The second set came more easily at 6-1, and Barker became the first American since Bradley Allen in 2000 to win a junior age division championship.

Allen, Camden Riviere and Barney Tanfield won six British junior between them during the golden era of 1997 to 2000, but in recent years there has been near-total U.K. domination, with the exception of France's Matthieu Sarlangue taking one title. U.S.-based pros who have come over from England and who won titles as juniors include Prince's Court's Ivan Ronaldson, Tuxedo's Josh Dodgson, and Philadelphia's John Lumley. Here's hoping future years will feature additional competitors making the trip to London, as it is always a great event at a world class location, featuring high levels of sportsmanship and camaraderie among the competitors.