

CROQUET

GAZETTE

Issue 411 | October 2024





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Croquet England
Issue 411 | October 2024



Front cover:
James Death at Nottingham
by Rob Edlin-White

CONTENTS

- 4 Hibiscus
- 5 Tunnel of Time
- 6 Croquet's James Death
- 8 Chairman's Column
- 10 Letters to the Editor
- 14 Association Croquet News
- 25 Golf Croquet News
- 39 Unofficial History
- 41 Coaching Pages

WELCOME

I can hardly believe the season is already drawing to a close. More worrying still, I've even designed a Christmas advert for the shop. Where does the time go? In my case, I felt the time was well spent this year travelling to a handful of tournaments to enjoy some fabulous Croquet holiday time. Many players like to visit a new club each year and I am no different. This year I got to visit Southport & Birkdale Croquet Club (as a spectator) and Hunstanton Croquet Club. Naturally, I was made to feel very much at home at both locations and I can't wait to go again.

With new clubs and tournaments, there have been new players to meet and new friends to make along the way. It's been such a privilege to hear the stories, laugh together and of course 'set the Croquet world to rights'. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who became part of my Croquet journey this year and, in particular, those of you who cared to share your thoughts about our very own Croquet Gazette. I am always interested to garner feedback about our Gazette; what people like to read, what they dislike and maybe even if there's something missing. Let me encourage you to help make our magazine the best it can be, have your say and get in touch with me.

Alison Maugham
Editor

editor@croquetengland.org.uk

NEXT TIME...

Issue 412, December 2024, will feature the following articles:

Reports of the Golf Croquet Open Series from Budleigh Salterton and Wiltshire

England's victory in the Eng/Esp Test Match

"Split without pull" by Pete Trimmer

"Croquet in the Community" by Adrian Coles

LORD DESBOROUGH

by Adrian Coles

Back in the April issue of the Gazette we published a book review by Adrian Coles from Surbiton CC, highlighting the career of Lord Desborough who, among many other achievements, was the longest serving President of the Croquet Association.

Our picture shows Adrian playing (or at least holding a mallet!) in front of Taplow Court, the magnificent former home of Lord Desborough, on the occasion of a launch party for the book earlier in the summer.

Taplow Court, near Maidenhead, is now the headquarters of SGI-UK, a lay Buddhist society and part of the wider international Buddhist community. The house and grounds are open to the public occasionally. Adrian says it is well worth a visit.



HIBISCUS COLUMN

by Minty Clinch

Why, you may ask yourself, would a his-bisquer enter a National Championship for the over Fifties? As the cynics pointed out, the majority of minus handicappers are 50+, but I love Budleigh so I went. And so did they. Back home at Blewbury, AC handicap is not a preferred discipline. Why would you give bisques to incompetents when you can enjoy the purity of advanced play? That didn't stop the big guns from heading for the Devon coast in force. They entered the level play event and sharpened their teeth on the easy meat in the handicap one that preceded it. So now I'm an even higher bisquer, but only a slightly wiser one.

I didn't play that badly, but I was royally outsmarted. Twice I lost leads built up by using bisques in the opponent's final turn. There can be few more joyous moments for a top player than shouting 'time' as the rookie is hitting their ball into position to use their last bisque to secure victory. This was swiftly followed by 'end of turn'. If my all too wily opponent could hit in, he'd have two perfectly placed balls to run the three hoops he needed for a +2 result. He could and he did. If time had come

five seconds earlier, I'd have rocketed my ball off the court which would have made it much, much harder. Note to self: always ask how long you've got before you hit.

New day, same scenario. With the low handicapper out of form at the start, I got a healthy lead with bisques to spare. An ideal situation until he clicked into his 4 ball break, devouring hoops with alarming dexterity. I was wiping my hand for the loser's shake when he jawsed an easy hoop. My balls were there, my bisques were there, then the inner idiot kicked in. Toast is a kind way of putting it. The memory still makes me cringe. Would I be tempted again? With lawns like velvet and a civilised bar, it's a no brainer.

Back on home turf, depression reigns. The internal competitions have been completed, as have the leagues and most Croquet England tournaments. Local engravers have a field day chiselling the same names onto club trophy plinths, supermarkets sell silver polish to holders who've allowed tarnish to build up, committee members argue over the next POTY - player of the year. Brilliant or worthy? There are cases for both; the arguments are fierce.

All must be completed before the AGM, a chilly under-attended gathering in a local hall. The senior committee members have unpopular things to say about winter court closures for essential improvements and the need to raise subscriptions in line with inflation. Although the treasurer's report explains the knife edge balancing act required to maintain quality while keeping a small club solvent, some of the attendees refuse to recognise the bargain they're getting. As they are. The cups, now gleaming, are returned to familiar custodians. A glass of wine is drunk, but nowhere near enough to lighten the all embracing gloom of addicts deprived of their fix for long winter months.

Solutions? I've booked my flights for the week-long AC tournament at Somerset West under Cape Town's Table Mountain in mid February. And I'm joining a second club as a Far Away member. I'll be in top company at Cheltenham. James Death, recently crowned European AC champion, lists Nottingham as his club, but serves on the Cheltenham committee. I'm told he can execute a triple peel with a pint of ale in one hand and his mallet in the other. Seeing would be believing. Maybe I'll get the chance...

CROQUET CENTENARIAN AT KINGTON LANGLEY

by Alison Maugham [Editor]

Kington Langley Croquet Club's Chairman, Ian Wills, informs us of their very own Croquet Centenarian. Bryan Edbrooke celebrated his 100th birthday in April!

He and his daughter Hilary Cadwgan both continue to enjoy their croquet together. They have both been members of Kington Langley CC for a number of years.

On his birthday he received a Birthday Card from the King & Queen. Not a formal photo, just one of them in everyday clothes. He was really pleased with that.



TUNNEL OF TIME

by Chris Williams
Croquet England Archivist

In this section we once again take a look through the 'Tunnel of Time' to see what was taking place in the Croquet World in the past as seen in the Croquet Gazette.

45 YEARS AGO

In the Winter 1979 Gazette (#154)

PRECIOUS MEDALS

With the soaring prices of gold and silver, anyone who is interested in the past cannot help wondering what has happened to the countless Gold and Silver awards in Croquet. Are they collector's items? Were they melted down in a former Gold rush, or for the War effort, or are they lying in a drawer of souvenirs - forgotten? About 800 Silver Medals have been awarded to winners in certain top class events since 1896 but of these only 200 have been won since 1919. I have not seen the early ones, perhaps Major G.F. Stone still has his which he won in 1912, but up to 1976 all the medals were made of silver. The more recent ones have the Birmingham hallmark and weigh about 11 dwt, while those of ten to twenty years ago are just under 10 dwt but were claimed by Spink to be of the higher Britannia standard (95.8% as against 92.5% silver content).

In addition many other Silver medals have been presented over the years: to Australia and New Zealand; to first-time winners of the Men's and Women's Championships etc. They were mainly awarded in prestigious level events but when the All England Handicap was inaugurated in 1923 eleven players in the play-off at Roehampton and each one was given a silver medal. Tom Todd, the Tennis historian, found one of these medals some years ago and kindly gave it to me. It is larger than a crown and has a deeply embossed croquet player on the face. The Irish grip can be seen clearly and, with the trouser turn-ups slightly above the ankles, it looks as though it might have been modelled on Duff Mathews. It weighs 10z 5 ½

dwt and is a handsome medal. The following year only the runner-up got the Silver medal but the winner got a Gold one and this continued right up to 1938.

Gold was not so lavishly awarded but there were Scottish and Irish Gold Medals, Riviera Gold Medals, Gold Mallets and the winners of the Men's and Women's Championships, up to the year 1935, were given a gold medal. Mrs Longman won the last. Parkstone and Southwick still have Gold Challenge Cups, then there is the embossed Ranelagh Cup (thought by some to be the most beautiful cup in croquet). The handsome Coronation Cup was presented in 1912; Lord Doneraile organised the fund-raising and wrote: "In all I have received the sum of £128 10s., which has been sufficient to provide a gold cup, plinth, case and a replica in silver gilt, and to cover expenses of engraving and collection". The most recent gold trophy is the Riggall Trophy for the South African equivalent of our President's Cup. In 1978 it was reported to be worth £3,500 but by this year nobody had the courage to take it out of the vault where it lives!

65 YEARS AGO

In the September/October 1959 Gazette (#41)

Where time stands still

That we live in a changing world is one of the most irrefutable truisms of our age, but a visit to the Sussex County Croquet Club, first seen by this Rover a full half century ago, led him to reflect on how little the venues of our tournaments have altered. Save that one of the erstwhile courts on the upper tier is now a car park, and that a small pavilion has (only this year) appeared beside the tennis courts, everything is exactly as it was fifty years ago. At Devonshire Park all looks just as it did in 1907 when a young man of 19 arrived, poring over Locock's just published Modern Croquet Tactics at every moment (and they were many) when he was not actually on the court. Woking, again, looks now just as it has done ever

since the pavilion on Hook Heath was enlarged 30 years ago. The historic ground at Budleigh Salterton has only been known to him for a quarter of a century, but except for the removal of the pine trees on the western side, nothing has altered the scene since then. At the London Clubs, however, time has not so evidently stood still, Few associates perhaps will now remember a day when Rivermead Court did not exist to form so convenient a home for members of Hurlingham, nor Fairacres direct glances at us when we retire to the garden at Roehampton. It is at this club, alas, where the scene perhaps has altered most and lawn tennis players now bound about a sward once reserved exclusively for our more ancient game.

90 YEARS AGO

In the October 27th 1934 Gazette (VOL XXXI No. 25)

Editorial Notes

On the 16th of next month Lt.-Col Du Pre, Sir Francis Colchester-Wemyss, Mr. H. Reginald Poulter and Mr E. L. Ward Petley will be sailing for Australia by P&O Line, SS Maloja, due at Brisbane on December 31st. How much we shall envy them this trip! They will first visit Sydney and Melbourne, thence across to Tasmania about the second week in January, returning to Melbourne for its International Tournament commencing on January 20th, to be followed by the strenuous series of three sets of Test Matches with the teams of Australia and New Zealand covering three consecutive weeks.

The team (Mr. Poulter excepted) will thence go on to New Zealand about February 27th, sailing ultimately on April 1st for Southampton (May 10th).

Past Gazettes can be found on the Croquet England website at <https://www.croquet.org.uk/?p=ca/gazette&Action=Issues>. Currently there are searchable scans of the Gazette back to 1954, when the current numbering system started, on the website.

CROQUET'S JAMES DEATH

EDITOR ALISON'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR AS DESCRIBED BY CHRIS CLARKE AND PETER DEATH (AKA DAD)

Two months ago I took editor's choice to a new level when I featured Jack Good as our cover boy. Well, this time it's James Death on whom I am choosing to shine the feature spotlight. I entitle the piece 'Croquet's James Death' because, although he's 'Alison's friend' and 'England Player', he's very much 'Croquet's' one of a kind.

James has never failed to entertain us, both on and off the courts, with flamboyant play during the day and displays of one handed 'beer in hand' exhibition play in an evening. Looking back at the memories I have with James, my favourite must be the one where we swapped mallets. This was during an Open Championship where having failed to hit a simple roquet with James' mallet, which was almost as tall as myself, he then completed the game with a triple peel using my mallet. And to slightly exaggerate, my mallet barely reached his knees. Even though I lost, I will always be grateful that he taught my mallet how to complete a peeling turn.

One of my favourite things about Croquet is our community which, at times, isn't just a community it's a family of friends. And James is one of those family members who isn't just at the heart of the family, he gives his heart to Croquet.

Oh, and he's also very good at it. This season James' trophy cabinet is overflowing with prizes from the following wins; Men's Championship, East Midland's Championship, Association Croquet Open Championship & Doubles Championship with partner Samir Patel, Association Croquet European Championship, Cheltenham Golf Croquet Open Championship and the Golf Croquet National Doubles Championship with partner Sam Cuthbert.

I asked Chris Clarke and Peter Death to put a few words together for me to share with our readers. I hope you enjoy learning a little more about our James.



FROM PETER DEATH

James has been around croquet clubs since he was a baby at Nottingham. He used to sit and watch from his pushchair, and we discovered that he was taking in what he had seen when, as he was playing on the floor at home, he put one ball next to another and hit them with a little hammer. Once he could walk, I made a little mallet for him, and he spent many happy hours on the triangle between lawns 1 and 2, hitting some plastic boules brought back from a holiday in France.

We didn't play GC to any extent at Nottingham in those days, but we used to finish coaching sessions with a round of GC, to help beginners get the idea of swinging the mallet freely. Some of them may have been rather discouraged when a 3-year old clutching a club mallet as tall as he was demonstrated how easy it was to hit from hoop 1 to hoop 2!

We moved away from Nottingham in 1981, as work took me to other parts of the country, until coming back within reach of Nottingham in 1989. During that time, James would have been seen hitting balls at Bowdon, Southport and Shrewsbury. He started tournament play as a teenager after our return. He then studied at Exeter University, where, I am told, he was seen regularly on the lawns at the Exeter club. After graduating, he took

James in the garden when he was 20 months old playing with the broken handle of a beach spade. Thankyou to Linda Death (aka Mum) for the pictures.



a job with a bingo hall in Tamworth, and stayed there for 20 years or so. This restricted his tournament play, since weekends were also working days, and he had to plan his annual leave carefully.

The Covid pandemic led to the closure of the bingo hall and redundancy for James, who was then snapped up by the CA (now CqE) office, where he has worked since. Weekends off, and somewhere to play just outside the office window.

FROM CHRIS CLARKE

James Death has been playing croquet since he was very young. This is probably the reason why he uses such a long mallet (46in) now and a penholder grip. He is probably the most entertaining croquet player in the world to watch, combining complex peeling turns with precision and a fast pace of play.

1993 was the first year that James played a ranked game and it was 12 years later that he first achieved a grade in excess of 2400. This was, in part, caused by the fact that he seemed to prioritise attempting difficult feats over winning the game. To this day, one of the great pleasures of watching James in a random Open weekend is that you know he'll be

trying a sextuple, a two ball break, QPO or some popping (peeling the opponent) turn. Balls are never quite where you expect them as he utilises one of the best stop shots in the game to keep tight control of the striker's ball. James is always on the lookout for interesting things to do such as getting "the clips" (having all four clips on your pocket). Usually to be found with pint of beer in his hand, he plays for fun....and that is very refreshing. Perhaps due to this focus on enjoyment, it took until 2014 until James was selected for the MacRobertson Shield where he has been a permanent fixture towards the top of the team ever since.

James won his first major event in 2007 (the President's Cup) and won

the Open Championship in 2019, 2022 and 2024, and has won the Men's Championship 8 times. James also plays GC and he is currently English National Doubles Champion with Sam Cuthbert. Due to losing the odd game of AC here and there due to his adventurous lines of play, his ranking tends to always be understated, but he is one of the key players that everyone hopes to avoid in a knockout draw.

In summary, if you get the chance to watch James play, take it. From all the players around the world who have enjoyed watching this unique croquet player, I say "thank you James, and long may it continue".



James at the Coles Championship 2019
by Samir Patel



Demonstrating his classic Pencil Grip
Photo above by Samir Patel
Photo right by Linda Death

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

by Samir Patel
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Croquet England, the National Governing Body for Croquet in England, has set forth an ambitious strategy to encourage more people to play more croquet in more places. Here are some of the themes:

1. **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Croquet is a sport that can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age or ability. Beginners can start in their garden, a local park, or at a club where they'll receive a warm welcome and all the necessary equipment. We will publish targets and plans to increase the Croquet England membership, and work to attract people from all backgrounds and abilities to all aspects and levels of our sport.
2. **Our Next Generation:** Croquet England aims to attract more players by promoting the sport as accessible and enjoyable. We have already started initiatives to get school-aged children excited about croquet, and we have a range of coaching programmes. We will work with clubs, federations and academies to encourage the growth of competitive play to suit all abilities, from club level through to international standard.
3. **Wellbeing and Safety:** Croquet provides physical exercise and mental stimulation, and can be played both by youngsters, once they are old enough to think strategically, and by those well into retirement. We need to build on this at all level within the croquet community to foster a culture of safeguarding for all, that welcomes everyone into our

sport. Our aspiration is for the general population to understand the health benefits of croquet and to enable clubs to deliver those benefits to local communities.

4. **Funding Growth:** Croquet currently relies on hundreds of hard-working volunteers. This commitment and dedication is – and will remain – essential to the smooth running of Croquet England. However, it is clear that we have an increasing number of roles that demand a large fraction of a person's time, or specialist skills. We plan to develop Croquet England's finances in a sustainable manner to be able to fund such posts. This will include working towards securing funding from various sources in addition to membership and tournament income.

Croquet is enjoyable, healthy, accessible, and open to all. Our strategy will inspire a new generation of players to appreciate these benefits and support the growth of our sport, leading to more people playing more croquet in more places.

To read more, the full strategy is published here: <https://www.croquetengland.org.uk/governance-matters/>



2024 STUDENT AC CHAMPIONSHIPS

by Charlie Sharpe

On July 27th & 28th, in usual fashion, the Oxford University Association Croquet Club (OUACC) hosted the annual Student Association Croquet Championships. This prestigious event, which has been held by the OUACC for many years, consists of both doubles and singles competitions (with a plate round).

This year saw one of the largest turnouts in the tournament's history, with 14 players travelling from across the UK and Europe to participate. Students represented universities including Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial, Manchester, BPP (Brierley Price Prior) University, and Bocconi University in Milan. Among the competitors were both the current (Charlie Sharpe) and



Pradeep Debata (Cam), Nicola Felicini (Cam), Jack Sydenham (Cam), Jerome Gasson (Cam), Charlie Sharpe (Ox), Patricia Duke-Cox (CqE President), Ben Risebrow (Cam), Teddy Wilmot-Sitwell (BPPU), Sue D. Nym (N/A), Jasper Singh (Ox), Hannah Smith (Bocconi), Ariana Muraru (Bocconi), Josh Jackson (Ox). Absent: Julius Gasson (ICL), Seth Butterfield (Manc).

former (Teddy W-Sitwell) OUACC Presidents, who faced each other in a gruelling singles final match, leaving everything on the field.

Each day saw spectacular weather, with the sun gracing the players and lawns under a cloudless sky for all 16 hours between sunrise and sunset.

MORE PEOPLE PLAYING MORE CROQUET IN MORE PLACES

by Sally Slater

The inaugural u3a festival took place over three days, 18th-20th July, at the University of York. Over 2000 people attended the festival and signed up to take part in the myriad of activities on offer, including music, craft, sports and lectures.

As the u3a Subject Adviser for Croquet, I had been asked if I would run croquet sessions for the attendees to 'have a go' during the festival. Nearly a hundred u3as have active croquet groups, over 30 linked with and playing at Croquet England clubs and affiliated to Croquet England. Other groups play on sports fields, at their own houses and even stately homes; a minimum of 1000 people and probably nearer 2000. Sheffield u3a croquet group alone has 80 members.

I anticipated there might already be a croquet lawn or similar at the University or at York, but in the event it turned out that there was a section of a field we could use to set up! I had a huge amount of help from York u3a and Sheffield u3a; Brian Cave from Sheffield agreeing to run a fun tournament on the Friday, and Aileen Hingston from York providing volunteers to help with the 'have a go' sessions.

The tournament attracted six pairs, from three croquet groups at York, Sheffield and Beverley. Anne and Maureen from Sheffield are now the u3a GC National Champions! In the future the aim is to involve more u3a groups across the

country in friendly or competitive games with each other. It is to be hoped that CqE clubs could facilitate or participate in some way in this endeavour.

There were a few administration hiccups, but in the end we successfully introduced croquet to over 30 people, some of whom expressed interest in setting up a group in their own u3a, growing croquet in the organisation. 'This has been the most brilliant afternoon', 'It is such fun', 'I want to play more' were three of the comments heard. We hope our u3a friends can keep learning croquet when they get home.

More people playing more croquet in more places - in action!



Unfortunately, the large number of entrants meant that the first games started at 8am. on both days, pushing students out of their comfort zones before play even started by being forced to get up before their usual 12 noon alarms went off. Additionally, play did not finish until 8pm., which was only made possible by the late summer sunset. Despite this, students were tremendously enthusiastic to get on the lawns and start playing, and this continued even as we passed the twelve hour mark on each day.

The doubles final went to time, with Jerome and Ben (J&B, Cambridge) putting in a fantastic shift and leading by 12 points when Jasper and Charlie (J&C, Oxford) had their final turn. However, J&C managed to claw their way back into the game by the skin of their teeth, finishing their turn with a one-hoop lead. J&B then had their



Group selfie at the pub after first day of play

final turn, needing to score one hoop to bring it to a golden point and two hoops to win. Unfortunately, they did not make their hoops, and the nail-biting game of croquet finished at 16-15 in favour of J&C.

The singles competition was equally entertaining. Teddy W-Sitwell managed a fantastic triple peel against an unsuspecting, and unfortunate,

Jasper Singh in the quarter-finals. Teddy then went on to win both the semi-final and grand final matches convincingly, securing the singles championship.

We were fortunate to have the President of Croquet England, Patricia Duke-Cox, present the trophies to the singles and doubles winners. She gave an excellent speech about the history of the tournament and the significance of the trophies. All in all, the tournament was a great success, and it was wonderful to see so many young players travelling from around the world to play some Association Croquet.

Singles winner: Teddy Wilmot-Sitwell, BPP University

Doubles winners: Charlie Sharpe & Jasper Singh, Oxford University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

READERS ARE REMINDED THAT THE VIEWS
EXPRESSED IN THE LETTERS PAGES OF THE
GAZETTE ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS ONLY,
AND NOT THOSE OF THEIR CLUBS, UNLESS
SPECIFICALLY INDICATED

NATIONAL SCHOOLS AND JUNIORS TOURNAMENT

In the report of the National Schools and Juniors championship, it is wondered whether this was the first time it was won by a comprehensive school. The answer is no. Farlingaye High School in Suffolk won the National Schools Championship in 2015, 16 and 17 – and members of that team also won the Juniors title in some of those years. There may have been others – Farlingaye also got to the final of the National Schools way back in 1984.

It is surprising that in the Roll of Honours page of Croquet England's website, there is no record of the National Schools or Juniors events – I had to dig back through News items to piece together the above, and there is no report for many years. Surely a serious omission if we hope to demonstrate the appeal of the sport to the widest age range?

Martin French

Response:

Reply from Marcus Evans, past organiser of these events: Martin is right on all counts – in 1997 I was a proud member of the winning Nailsea School team (my first ever croquet tournament), they also won in the early 90s prior to my involvement and are a comprehensive school. I also agree records should be better, in my tenure as organiser I did some research on this but never concluded the project, apologies to all involved. I still have the old emails so will endeavour to move it up my to-do list!

BEAUTIFUL CROQUET

I played in the GC National Doubles at Budleigh Salterton late July and, surrounded by three giants of the sport (my partner Jenny Clarke, and opponents James Death and Sam Cuthbert), I was playing a semi-final. My own contribution was modest, but from the others there were balls flying about everywhere: spectacular distant clearing; positioning shots of excellence; and hoop running of class and daring. One of the games even got to the golden (13th). The result isn't of importance here; what is of interest is the remark one lady, sitting watching, said to my wife Joyce after the match was over: "That's the most beautiful game of croquet I've ever seen." GC beautiful? Beautiful croquet? Now that has a nice ring to it.

Roger Goldring, member (Phyllis Court member)



Join the facebook group @CroquetHub
Image of Compton Croquet Club's 125th Anniversary Celebrations, text inspired
by Roger's spectator at Budleigh Salterton.

GC HANDICAPS - CONTINUED

I refer to Ralph Timms' letter ('GC Handicaps - continued', Croquet Gazette August 2024) regarding index points gained for winning or losing games. I don't think Ralph understands the purpose of the handicapping system which I would describe as follows (perhaps someone from the handicapping committee can correct me if I am wrong).

A player's handicap should reflect their ability to play the game such that when two players play several games against each other neither profits more than the other unless they are playing better/worse than their handicap, which then indicates their handicap should change. For example:

When playing a handicap game the extra strokes or advantage hoops should be such that both players have an equal chance of winning.

When playing level games it's slightly more complex. In the example given by Ralph we have a handicap 4 playing a handicap 8. I suggest that in this case the 4 should be expecting to win about 80% of games (8 out of 10), which is precisely what is reflected in the Points Exchange table, i.e. 8 wins = $8 \times 4 = 32$ points and 2 losses = $2 \times 16 = 32$ points so neither player benefits. To change this situation Ralph needs to improve his game to the point where he's winning nearly 90% of games (9 out of 10, assuming his opponent remains consistently at 8) so he'll go down to a 3 handicap, at which time the points exchanged will be 3 or 17 ($9 \times 3 = 18$, $1 \times 17 = 17$) again restoring the balance. If Ralph only expects to win about 70% of games against this opponent then either his handicap should be 5 so the points exchanged will be 6 or 14, or his opponent is really a 7 handicap so the points exchanged would be 5 or 15. The point here is that your handicap should not change just by the number of games you play, but only when your ability to play the game gets better or worse.

LETTERS CONTINUED

... CONTINUED

The handicap system can never be perfect because handicaps change in discrete steps and players have good days and bad days, and good games and bad games on the same day. It also relies on clubs and club handicappers taking handicapping seriously in order for members' handicaps to reflect their abilities, not just between players within the club but also compared to other players around the country.

Of course there is the perennial problem of players who are not correctly handicapped, usually "bandits" who are playing about 3 steps better than their handicap. I've met a few in tournaments and it is a bit frustrating, however, this situation is not just the player's fault as it is their club and club handicapper who have the responsibility to make adjustments where required. If you play a wide range of players (and particularly players outside your club in tournaments and league matches) then some are likely to be better than their handicap and some worse, so the effect on your index should even out over time.

Finally, I can see some merit in the argument that the score should somehow be reflected in the points exchanged. However, I believe this reflects more on the players having a good/bad game or an imbalance in good/bad fortune. Therefore, in my opinion, any adjustment to index points would be a significant over-complication to the system and not genuinely reflect a change in the players' abilities.

I suggest that what Ralph is complaining about is precisely the main purpose of the handicap system. I believe the system works very well as it stands, providing most players are appropriately handicapped (i.e. at, or within 1 step of, their playing ability).

Tony Hicks (Chichester & Fishbourne Croquet Club- club handicapper)

MORE ON GC HANDICAPS

Some background to our handicap systems might be useful. I can assure readers that more than 'a little thought' went into the current systems used in AC and GC.

A physics professor and chess master, called Arpad Elo, developed a rating system to rank chess players, initially in America. Now very many sports and games, around the world, use the Elo rating system to rank players and teams. It is essentially a measure of the relative probability that A will beat B, based on their recent results.

In the late 1980s, AC wanted to move from the previous subjective handicapping system which varied greatly between clubs. A system based on the Elo rating system was developed by the Handicap Committee. It was tested first using all results from a year at one very active club, then trialled across a croquet federation the next year. It worked as expected, so was rolled out nationally. It is still in use today with few modifications - and has been adopted by most croquet-playing countries.

In the new millennium, GC took off in its modern form and a simplified version of the AC system was initially adopted. It worked well enough in the middle ranges. But by the early 2010s, a large number of players had all hit the lower limit of zero.

So, three eminent croquet-playing mathematicians were asked how to improve the system. Thousands of game results were collected from around the country and fed into a huge spreadsheet. The GC 'new system' was devised taking account of this data and trialled for a year in one federation. Thousands more results were then collected and analysed, to ensure the system worked correctly. It was rolled out 10 years ago, remains stable, and has been adopted around the world.

Ralph Timms thinks it takes too many games to recover from losing to a weaker player. But the probability is that a 4-handicap player will beat an 8-handicap player four times out of five. So, in 5 games, the 4-handicap player will win 4 times (gaining 4 index points each time, total of +16), and will lose once (losing 16 index points). In 5 games, they should end up even. If not, one or both players are incorrectly handicapped or didn't play to their recent form.

Analysis of this data in 2014 also showed the winning margin was insignificant to the accuracy of the handicap system, but would make it far more complicated – a win is a win, whether 7-6 or 7-0.

Some handicaps over 16 might seem unnecessary. It is indeed rare for anyone with a very high handicap to play in league matches, but the handicap system is also there for club events. New players often start somewhere in the 12-16 range, but some may lose many of their games for the next year, drifting up to 20. Generally, at some point, the penny drops and they begin to come down again. They may end up a successful and long-term contributor to their club. In my club's handicap events, we get everyone from minus players to 20s playing – why would anyone want to stop someone with a 20 handicap from entering?

Martin French

GC LEVEL-PLAY TOURNAMENTS

I understand there is a proposal to change the starting bands for GC level-play singles competitions next season. This includes changing the B-level play series from 3+ to 4+ because many of the B level events are over-subscribed. Those of us who are 3-handicap and enjoy competitive play will then be forced to join the A-level 0+ series tournaments which are all two-day events unlike the majority of B-level competitions which are one day. Those 3-handicap players who wish to play two days already have the option of playing the A-level series, so I am not sure what benefit there will be except to alienate those 3-handicap players who do not or cannot play two days.

Keith Bryant, Dowlish Wake CC

Response:

Hi Keith,

Thank you for your letter.

I am pleased that you have heard about the idea to change the B-Level handicap restriction, as it means players have the chance to share their thoughts, and that will help the GC Tournaments Committee decide whether to make any changes.

The current state of the GC Series is that most of the B-Level events are well oversubscribed, and the 6 (and sometimes even 5) handicaps are struggling to get into these events.

There are some spaces in the A-Level Series, but not all 5 and 6 handicaps feel comfortable entering them. It should be the 3 handicaps that want to challenge themselves at the next level.

We realise not everyone wants to play 2-day events, but players who are handicap 3 would face that situation if they improve to a 2 anyway.

In addition, the level of play has improved much since the Series were introduced, and while the B-Level Series was suitable for 3 handicaps in the past, we believe they are now better suited to the A-Level Series.

The reason for the change would be so that the Series events cater for as many players as possible, and to not have too many events with a big reserve list when there are spaces in others. We have been collecting the data from the Series allocations to determine the extent to which this is the case.

I would also like to remind everyone that there are tournaments outside the Series for which clubs can decide their own restrictions.

However, they are standalone events and there are no points up for grabs.

Richard Bilton, Chair GC Tournaments Committee

NEWLY QUALIFIED GC REFEREES

From Ian Cobbold

Congratulations to Eric Audsley, Tim Brewer, George Collin, Michael Tideswell (all Wrest Park) and John Watson (Leighton-Linslade)

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY INFORMATION

From Andy Dibben, Director of Infrastructure & IT

A new feature has been added to the subscribers section of the website for players to add In Case of Emergency (ICE) information.

Access to this information is restricted to club officials of club(s) that the subscriber is a member of and tournament officials for the duration of an event that the player has entered.

The information can be added on the 'personal details' section of your membership record and you will also be prompted to add/amend the details when entering a tournament.

The information is optional. However, please provide it as there have been a few occasions where a player has fallen ill at an event and we have not known who to contact.

GABRIELLE HIGGINS APPOINTED SECRETARY TO THE CIO

From Samir Patel

Croquet England's trustees have appointed Gabrielle Higgins as Secretary to the CIO and to the Board of Trustees. The role is responsible to the CIO through the Board of Trustees for providing independent leadership and guidance in matters relating to administration, encouraging the highest standards of integrity, effectiveness, and openness, and has a duty to ensure the CIO's regulatory compliance.

For more information on the tern CIO please see the full announcement. www.croquet.org.uk/?p=press/news&NewsID=8614



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2024 Association Croquet European Championship

by Martin Murray

The 25th European Championship was held at Carrickmines from August 15th to 18th. This was a welcome return of the event, which had not been held since 2018. Over the years it has been held in a total of five different countries: this was the third occasion that Ireland had hosted the event. Carrickmines has four excellent lawns, a minimum capacity to host all the countries able and willing to send competitors. Alan Looney managed the event with a good-natured and relaxed competence.



It is somewhat of a hybrid event, combining a top-class tournament capable of attracting Europe's top players with a development role in offering competitive experience to the smaller and newer croquet playing countries. Thus, this year the entry of twenty players included three English players selected for this year's Presidents Cup (James Death, Stephen Mulliner, and Gabrielle Higgins), two Irish players of similar standard (Andrew Johnston and Simon Williams), and four more, two English (David Fuller and Jack Good), one Welsh (Rick Harding), and one Swiss (Ian Sexton), with grades over 2000. The international variety of the entries was shown by the participation of one further English player (John Gosden), two Irish (Nathaniel Healy and Russell Harris), two Scottish (David Houston and Mark Shanks), two Swedish (Joakim Norbäck and Archibald Zimonyi), one German (Joern Vinnen), one Austrian (Andreas Hartmann), one Portuguese (Dusan Turcer), and one Latvian (Andrejs Savinovs), making a total of ten countries. In playing experience, they ranged from one or two years (Jack and Andrejs) to almost fifty years (Stephen).

The tournament started with four blocks of five players, and the wide range of abilities (a 1500 grade difference between top and bottom) meant that many games were very one sided, and therefore quite quick. With two players qualifying from each block the only real contest was in Block 3, where the battle for the two qualifying places was very close between Andrew Johnston, Jack Good, and Rick Harding. Jack was unlucky to lose to triple peels from both Andrew and Rick, so failed to qualify for the knock-out stage. Fortunately for the manager, no block had any ties, so the block play was comfortably completed early on the second day, and the best of three knock-out stage started the same day.

The first round produced two surprises, Simon Williams beating Andrew Johnston with two swift triples, then David Fuller beating Gabrielle Higgins. A further surprise seemed possible when Ian Sexton, having got to peg and 4-back against Stephen Mulliner in the second game, and then having his peg ball pegged out by Stephen, hit a forty-yard shot from corner four to corner two. He made 4-back, and looked likely to finish, but failed to approach penultimate and his chance was gone.

The semi-finals produced triple peels in all five games. Stephen Mulliner and Simon Williams provided three of them, alternating +26tp scores, but Stephen's were in the first and third games, so he ran out the winner. That meant that Simon had played six consecutive games with a scoreline of +26tp. Possibly a record? In the other semi-final David Fuller ran James Death very close, getting to peg and peg in the second game, but failing to peg out giving James the chance to pounce.

So the final between James and Stephen, which Alan decided to play best of five, was keenly anticipated. James has been in imperious form this season, winning both the Men's Championship and the Open, but Stephen has won this event a staggering 13 times, and is still playing world-class croquet. The first two games were shared tpo's, but in games three and four Stephen stuck in 2-back and 3-back at critical moments, allowing James to strike with clinical triples each time. James thus won the event on his first attempt.

While all this excitement was going on in the main event, there was plenty of excitement in the consolation events which WCF regulations provide to give plenty of play for all contestants.

The first of these was the Shield, which starts with the three players from each block who failed to qualify for the main knock-

out. Since Nathaniel Healy unfortunately had to withdraw due to contracting Covid, the tournament director, Sandy Greig, took his place in the Shield. The winners were then joined by the first-round losers of the main knock-out. These might have been expected to provide the winner, but Jack Good, having been unluckily eliminated at the block stage, managed to prevail in a high-class three triples final against Gabrielle Higgins. Jack, the youngest player in the tournament by some distance, who has only been playing Association Croquet for two years, has already reached a remarkable level of skill and maturity. Definitely one to watch for the future.

The Bowl is for the four players who lose in the quarter-finals of the Shield. Unfortunately, Andrew Johnston had to withdraw for family reasons, so the event only had three contestants. Ian Sexton, after his disappointment against Stephen Mulliner in the main event, was too good for both Russell Harris and David Houston, so won both games.

The final formal event, for the seven players eliminated from the Shield in the early stages, was the Plate, which saw Joakim Norbäck emerge as the winner with four wins out of five. He was run close by Dusan Turcer with three out of four, who saw his grade improve by almost 100 points over the tournament. The other players all got at least four games and one win in the event, which provided all of them with educational and competitive experience.

Play was generally quick, especially in the main event, with a total of 28 triples, 3 tpo's, and 2 quadruple peels in 94 games. On Friday, having completed four consecutive triples, and having to wait for her next game, Gabrielle Higgins asked the manager to allow her and Rick Harding to play a "Z" game. Alan duly obliged, and Gabrielle promptly completed her first ranking sextuple peel with no apparent difficulty, a feat which eluded both James and Stephen during the four days, despite several attempts by both of them.

The full measure of Irish hospitality was evident throughout the event. The Croquet Association of Ireland kindly hosted two excellent social events, a barbecue on Friday evening and a dinner on Saturday evening, and the facilities of the Carrickmines club were a joy for all the competitors.



QUILLER MEMORY

by Tony Newport
Ex-Secretary, Eynsham CC

I was Secretary of Eynsham CC in 2021, and myself and my wife had gone to the Finals of the Grass Roots Competition at Watford CC to support our then new member, Chris Pomfret, sadly now deceased.

Quiller, who I did not know, was walking round the courts, and stopped to introduce himself and chat. He asked about us and our Club. I told him that our club suffered from not having a clubhouse, which we felt limited our potential for growth. He suggested that we should apply for a CA grant, and put me in contact with Peter Allan, the Development Officer.

Peter helped us with our Grant Application, which was successful and in 2022 he attended the "opening" of our new clubhouse. Quiller was also scheduled to attend, but at the last moment a friend he was staying with had a fall, and Quiller had to cancel.

However, our local MP opened the new clubhouse.

We are now a much more thriving club, with increased membership, and Doubles Only League Winners, as well as success in other competitions, including entrants in the Finals of the C-level (2 members) and B-level.

My point is that from a casual conversation with Quiller, all this flowed. He was a generous and thoughtful man with his time. It is possible that nobody knows of this, his contribution to our club.

AC First Eight: The President's Cup

by Chris Clarke

This year, the President's Cup was back at its historic home of Hurlingham (1958-1989). Despite some rainy spells the lawns were in excellent condition, running around 12 seconds and that, combined with Quadway hoops and some imperfect play, led to many close games and fewer peeling turns than usual (31 compared to 39 and 40, on the last 2 visits to Hurlingham). Perhaps most notable was that there were zero sextuples completed compared to 11 and 4 previously.

Most thought that the event could be split into two groups of 4 – a “probables” including James Death, Samir Patel, Harry Fisher and Stephen Mulliner and a “possibles” including Gabrielle Higgins, Debbie Lines, Robin Brown and David Goacher. It therefore came as a surprise at the end of day 1 to find Gabrielle leading on 3/3 with Brown and Goacher just behind on 2/3. Some players did complete the expected 4 games, but they remained on 2/4. The afternoon had seen a deluge of rain that waterlogged the northern edge of lawn 3, but only delayed play by about 20 minutes. With the lawns cast in deep shadow by 7.30pm and a fairly late start, it was proving challenging to complete four games in a day despite only about 20% of games being played super-advanced.

The remaining three days were played in drier and easier conditions with the lawns running half a second slower. Robin Brown continued his excellent form from day 1, winning all 4 games to have a clear 2 game lead on 6/7. It was becoming trickier to work out who was still well in contention since some players had finished 8 games and others only 6, but what was clear was that the game between Harry Fisher and Debbie Lines, both on 0/5, was a “must win” for both. It was the sort of game that summed up the event. After Harry reached 4-b and peg, Debbie went round and pegged Harry out leaving 1+peg vs 4-b, but forgot she was conceding contact and had a 12- yard wide join south of C2. From this, Harry was able to make 4-b and penultimate, but failed rover. Debbie joined in C2, Harry ran rover and decided to shoot at the double of Debbie's balls in C2 and just South of C2 “because she couldn't get a break from there”, only to miss and subsequently realise that Debbie could get a C2 cannon and finish, which she duly did.

In contention, were Higgins, Patel, Death, Goacher and Mulliner, all 2 to 4 games behind but with a game or two pegged down.

Day 3 was moving day. Samir accelerated into the lead, and with Robin losing all 4 games, this left Gabrielle as the only likely challenger to Samir.

The final day needed Gabrielle to win her games and Samir to falter. Debbie peeled Gabrielle out with a triple and pegged 2 balls out to leave 3-b against hoop 2. Gabrielle had three opportunities to win, but ended up in front of rover with Debbie (for peg) dribbling to North of the peg. Gabrielle ran rover but missed the shot back north and Debbie won +1tpo. This was one of four +1 results and one of 14 single figure wins during the event, a testament to how just a slight alteration in the difficulty of hoops can make a big difference to the error count.

Samir won in round 13 to ensure victory – his third victory in this event, despite losing his last game to Harry.



Gabrielle came a creditable second and looked an improved player in many aspects. However, with just 1 successful peeling turn, there are clear areas to work on as she challenges for a place in the 2026 England Mac team.

In equal third were James Death, Stephen Mulliner and Robin Brown on 7 wins. This is the only event James hasn't won this year and his

entertaining style is probably less suited to an event where consistency is rewarded. Stephen played creditably, albeit at a significantly lower standard to his excellent end to the 2023 season. Robin had triple peels in all his 7 wins and looked in fantastic form, winning 6 games in the first series. He will no doubt be satisfied with 7 wins, but will also be looking back at his closest chance yet of winning a major.

After a bad start, Debbie did well to pick up 6 wins to finish 6th. In joint 7th, David Goacher was always competitive and Harry Fisher overcame a 0/5 start to win 5 games with four triples – he simply came to the event underprepared in a year without an AC Worlds or MacRobertson to focus on.

I should finish by thanking Stephen Allen and his filming crew for setting new standards for live-streaming. All four days play on lawn 4 can be seen on the Croquet England YouTube account – a valuable resource to see how leaves can be made and how pegged out endings can be played. Many thanks to Keith Aiton, Jack Wicks, Andrew Gregory, Jamie Burch and Nick Parish for their commentary which was much appreciated.

AC Second Eight: The Chairman's Salver

by David Fuller

Welcome to sunny Ramsgate? Well sadly the weather did not play ball for much of the time. Nevertheless, Ramsgate Croquet Club is in a lovely part of the world, with great courts, welcoming members and fantastic views out into the channel. It was just a bit windy, at least for the first couple of days.

Collective wisdom suggested that it was a pretty level playing field and anyone could win. I expect that you all know the results now due to WhatsApp updates and, I suspect, a large heading above this text, but try to forget that and enjoy the tension of the journey... You will excuse the odd self-reference, but I did have a hand in the story.

Day1 - Windy as Hell

Jack and Omied set the pace on the first day, with the wind causing problems for some of us, or perhaps it was just me. Rob suddenly kicked into gear with a +26tp to prevent Omied joining Jack on 4/4 for the day. My imperfect memory suggested that Jack had it easy, but the scoresheets show that his games were close and he had demonstrated that a choker, he is not! The rest of us washed around on 1-2/4, just warming up we all hoped.

Day2 - Same as Day1

More wind and the courts seemed faster to me, with balls moving significantly offline in the stiff Easterly. Not easy conditions, although a good number of peeling turn finishes were noted. I was pleased to have an excellent day with 4/4 and my first ranking qp (followed by a small round of applause and a whole bunch of 'well, what you could have done is' comments, all fair though). Omied and Jack continued as they had left Day1. The three of us were tied with 6/8 with a gap to almost everyone else on 3/8. Dave Kibble, defending his title, was not having much luck on 2/8.

Day3 - Calm and Sunny

The sun came out, the sun-cream went on! Hooray! These are the days when it is a joy to play this game. Lovely weather and lovely fast courts.

In golf, the third day is called 'moving day', when competitors jostle into position for the final push to victory. Well, nobody really did this at all in truth with Jack, Omied and I winning just five matches between us. Jeff didn't obey East Dorset team orders and beat me in a three-ball ending, but then did beat Jack, preventing him from moving one clear of the field.

Scores: JG 8/12, DF 8/12, OH 7/12. Most of the field was only a game back, but with Jack and I playing first on the final day, only a string of specific results would allow Omied to prevent either Jack or I winning the Salver.



A Group dinner organised by Trevor was much appreciated in the evening. A lovely location right at the end of the Ramsgate East Pier provided all the fishy food that we could want.

Day4 - Wet Wet Wet

Sunday started dry but got progressively wetter throughout the day.

The key game between Jack and I was first up. It was pretty interactive! Jack got to Peg/Peg with a TP attempt after I had failed Rover from a foot in front leaving me on 4b/Rov. I hit the short lift but managed to take off off the court, like a muppet, leaving Jack a trivial finish. A good game in which both of us felt we should have won. Well played Jack.

Axeman Rob advised that I haven't a nickname yet. Perhaps 'Choker' Fuller will be proposed in time (careful of the possible spoonerism there). That would be better than some I have had in the past anyway.

With a last chance for a play-off in the final round, Jack won his final game without trouble, and I lost my final game to Annabel, again with no trouble. Well done Jack! The best man won.

With the rain coming down heavily, the trophy was presented to Jack (under cover), who thanked everyone involved, highlighting how smoothly everything ran due to Jeff's excellent tournament management, and how hard Trevor had worked to get the courts in such good condition. We also thanked the ladies providing the excellent lunches and afternoon teas.

Many tps were completed as well as a qp (have I mentioned that?), with everyone completing peeling turns, so all in all a reasonably high quality of play throughout the four days.

The group photo took 23 milliseconds, mainly due to Annabel not being too happy standing in the heavy rain with a jumper with small holes in it (I tried to put a Golf Croquet joke in, but thought better of it).

AC Third Eight: The Spencer Ell Cup

by Andrew Killick

“Come down, O Muse, describe the Spencer Ell
And tell us who played badly, who played well.”

No, on second thoughts we won't have any more poetry this year, after last year's limericks describing the Treasurer's Tankard. Talking of which, three of us were competing at Pendle in the 2023 TT, and the improvement in the lawns was remarkable. Last year there were problems with the mowing, but this year the lawns were superb – a great credit to the club, backed up by excellent catering facilities. Many thanks to all who worked so hard to make it such an enjoyable five days of competition.

And the competition was indeed fierce. Here are the players and their handicaps:

Neil Adams (-1.5) Sam Cuthbert (3.5)

Robert Essler (0.5) Rick Harding (-1)

Andrew Killick (-1.5) Paul Rigge (-1)

Mike Town (-1.5) Andrew Winn (-1)

Or, as all players seem to have very distinct styles, stances and mannerisms, shall I call them (in no particular order) Mr Thoughtful, Mr Flowing, Mr Unconventional, Mr Methodical, Mr Precise, Mr Determined, Mr Confident and Mr Accurate? (Sorry, guys, I am not revealing who's who!) Anyway, play began on 5th September...

THURSDAY

The skies were grey, the winds were strong. Neil was the first to make his mark, winning his first two games, both with triple peels. I (Andrew K) was the unfortunate victim in that second game, playing just four shots after my marathon 4-hour first game against Robert; however, by the end of the day six players were tied for the lead with two wins each; and Paul had notched up a TP as he won his evening game against Robert.

FRIDAY

A day of beautiful sunshine – but alas, I lost all three games, as did Paul and Robert. Top of the class were Mike and Rick, both with three wins, and Rick had two TPs to his credit. Sam, Neil and Andrew W were in the middle, having won two games each, and Andrew W had achieved a TP against Sam.

SATURDAY

Another cloudy day with some drizzle. Lunchtime brought the first half of the tournament to an end, and the standings were as follows: Rick (6 out of 7), Mike, Neil and Andrew W (5), Andrew K (3), Sam and Paul (2) and Robert (0).

I had a good day for a change, with three wins. So did Rick, with yet another TP in his morning game against Mike. He was the clear leader with 8 wins out of 9, but Mike (7) and Andrew W (6) were breathing down his neck. In the evening Paul had arranged a Chinese meal which I gather was much enjoyed.



SUNDAY

The day dawned very gloomy and grey. There was heavy rain, and the water roller couldn't entirely cope with it, so play was slow. Did I say slow?

Though play had begun at 9.30am, most of the third games of the day could only get going at 5.59pm! Somehow almost everyone finished before darkness fell, and Sam, Neil, Mike, Paul and Rick won two out of their three games. Neil and Rick both notched up another TP. That meant that after twelve rounds it was very close at the top. Rick led the field with 10 wins, followed by Mike (9), Neil (7) and Andrew W (7), while the rest of us lagged behind.

MONDAY

It proved to be a worthy and nail-biting climax to the tournament. More rain, alas, but there were some amusing episodes. Andrew W did something I have never seen before – a deemed lift shot, where he took his ball to corner 3 but feared that he might miss his target and end up in corner 4 near Sam's hoop, so he didn't actually play a shot. And shortly after that Sam did a gentle hoop run: for those of you who don't know, Sam's usual style is to hit hoop runs or shots to the boundary so hard that they end up in the next county – well, the far side of the adjoining lawn anyway! There were great cheers when Robert got his first win – he had come in as a late substitute for a player who had to withdraw, and he might have preferred to play in a different Eight. There were gasps of surprise when Paul attempted to jump over hoop 1 to roquet a ball about twelve yards away: the jump was fine, and he very nearly got the roquet. But the three-ball finish in Mike's game versus Paul was amazing, as well as being crucial for the outcome of the tournament.

Paul, on peg and rover, got stuck on the wire; Mike made hoop 4 back and took position not all that close to penult; Paul didn't want to tap his ball into a runnable position at rover, so he retreated to join his partner ball in corner 2; Mike could have shot at the two balls in corner 2, but instead he ran penult and ended up at an angle about eight yards from rover; after some thought he attempted the

hoop run and went right through to the south boundary; he could just see the peg some 17 yards away, had a go...and hit it!

What a finish, enabling him to get within one point of Rick, who had just done a TP against me (on the soggiest lawn I have ever experienced) and was due to meet Mike in the final round.

And then the sun came out. After lunch Neil did another TP to beat Sam; I got to peg and rover against Paul and won when he gave me another chance by hampering himself after running hoop 1; Andrew W beat Robert in the very last game to finish; and meanwhile, calmly getting on with things

away on lawn 2, Mike played a well-controlled game against Rick to win 26-2. That meant he had drawn level with him on 11 wins out of 14, and they played a decider. This time it was Rick who kept control of the game, and he won 26-0 with a sometimes adventurous TP.

So the final scores were Rick and Mike on 11, Andrew W and Neil 8, Andrew K 7, Sam and Paul 5 and Robert 1. Sam had the honour (or punishment?) of having his handicap reduced to 1; and Rick Harding was the victor with his, often faultless, play and five TPs – a winner well worthy to follow in the steps of our illustrious predecessor Spencer Ell, who lost two arms in the First World War but still managed to become a fine player of this wonderful game.

AC Fourth Eight: The Treasurer's Tankard

by Martin Murray

The usual mixture of achievement and disgrace was evident in this year's version of the Tankard, so some anonymity will be maintained for those responsible for the latter.

Eight players eventually arrived at Colchester, most of whom having rejected the offer of promotion to the Spencer-Ell. Two previous winners of the event duly showed up, despite the jinx which declares that no-one wins the Tankard twice. Two more had one previous appearance in the event, last year at Pendle, leaving four virgins who had never played in an Eight of any description before.

As always happens at the start of the Tankard, some bright spark (one of the four virgins) suggested that we should try to play four rounds a day. "Dream on", an old hand warned, and as events turned out, he was right. He reminded those present that four rounds a day is quite different from four games a day. Rounds move at the pace of the slowest player, and he forecast that "Mr. (or possibly Mrs.) X" would hold up each round.

The first day was grey and overcast, and the Colchester lawns showed none of the pace for which they are famous. The field rapidly became spread out, one player ending on three wins, two on no wins, the remaining five clustered together on one or two wins. Most games were close, and no +26 victories, let alone triples, were recorded.

On Day 2 the lawns were mown, but then came the news that Jane Morrison had had a bad fall the previous evening and had to withdraw. This meant that play could proceed on the three better lawns (Lawn 4 has been used as two half-size lawns for most of the season). The sun came out, but play proceeded at the same pace, again no +26, no triples. The overnight leader lost to one of the players with no wins on the first day, so there was no obvious sign who might win the event. The highlight of the day was Mr. Y laying up giving his red ball a nice rush on black!

Days 3 and 4 saw a continuation of slow, close games, peppered with failed triple attempts. At 5 o'clock on day 4,



with round twelve barely started, and four games pegged down, the heavens opened, and play was suspended for half an hour. By now the manager was starting to get even more worried than he had been throughout the event. He had visions of a four-way tie! At least play in round twelve was swifter, so it could be completed before dusk.

But as often happens in these events, events turned out favourably for the manager. Round thirteen, though slow, brought a win for the leader, Joe King, who then promptly finished and won a pegged-down game against his possible challenger, David Warhurst, to establish a winning lead. So, no play off was necessary, and two games could be left unfinished.

The jinx had played its part. The two previous winners finished equal second with Keith Ross, whose occasionally eccentric tactics earned him a good finish on six games, and only four games separated the winner from Nick Steiner in seventh. He had one unfinished pegged-down game, and never started his last game, so could possibly have come second if he had won those two games.

So only 43 games were completed, no triples were done, and no game was won +26. Not a vintage Tankard in playing terms, but the Colchester club did us proud with excellent hospitality.

The Selectors' Weekend

by Alex McIntyre

So, the common thinking is that the further south you go, the more clement the weather.... Unless that is you're playing in the selectors at Bath in September 2024. Whilst the Tankard at Colchester basked in 25 degree sunlight, and Pendle shone like a jewel in the north for the Spencer Ell, the Friday morning games at Bathwick involved serious wet-weather gear, with torrential rain falling for most of the morning and temperatures struggling to get above 16 degrees.

Fortunately, 3 of the 4 lawns were up to the task and played beautifully, whilst the reduced field of 13 got to grips with the event. Played as a very flexible Swiss due to the odd number of entries, the first day's play ended with Sophie McGlen on 3 from 3 with a healthy pack chasing on 2 from 3, largely thanks to Mike Porter's ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, a trait he would continue into the second day.

One such match on the Saturday against Simon Tuke went to time with Mike 7 hoops ahead, paired up on the west boundary. A 25yard hit in followed, with Simon taking pink from 1-back peeling partner through 3-back and accidentally pegging his ball out to force the golden hoop. Two balls against one.... What could go wrong.....?

Our illustrious manager, Andy Dibben noted that there had been two grievouses by the Saturday evening and indeed Peter Thompson had expertly engineered a 6 yards cut rush into the peg on the Friday. However, by asking all players about the second, it quickly became clear that the rigours of managing the tournament had made Andy hallucinate...

Meanwhile Bob Thompson took pegging out to heart and expertly pegged out Peter ... forgetting the unfortunate fact that he had yet to make rover with his own ball, prompting much hilarity from the gallery.

The Saturday afternoon brought the neighbouring Bath Rugby Club sound system into play, banging out Oasis, the Beatles and other crowd-pleasers at which point Alex McIntyre decided to play croquet (albeit briefly) in his victory over Charlie.

Guy Hewitt also came into form in the afternoon and by close Sophie was on 6/6, Robbie 'the Casting King' Dodds (think Djokovic pre-serve routine), Alex & Guy making up the numbers on 4/6 and the semi-finals were set for the next day.

Sunday's forecast loomed but the morning weather held and Sophie shot out of the blocks against Guy getting to peg & 4-back in double quick time. A bevelled one yarder let Guy in who two balled for a while until pairing in corner 2, leaving a double(ish) from B-baulk. Sophie's finishing turn included a 9 yard return roquet from the boundary to push partner to peg.

In the other semi-final, Alex never really got started and Robbie made steady progress to win.

As the 3rd place play off got underway, Guy and Alex began to question the wisdom of their previous night's alcohol consumption and played a typically scrappy game involving lots of huffing.... or so we thought. After struggling to 4-back Guy missed the lift and Alex completed the only triple peel of the tournament, which included the textbook 15 yard rover peel....

In the final, Sophie once again took first blood with a flawless break to 4-back. Robbie hit the lift but could only make it to 3, sticking on the wire. Yet another McGlen hit-in reclaimed the innings and she went to peg.

Robbie hit the lift and took red to 4-back but this time Sophie's shooting deserted her and Robbie started a TP turn but missed a short roquet approaching 5, leaving Sophie a short hit-in with the peg ball and pairing up in corner 3. After Robbie missed, Sophie held her nerve by two-balling 4-back and Penult and taking off to oppo in corner 1 to make rover and win.

All the players agreed that Bath had been excellent hosts, with Andrew Willis looking after the bar, Philip managing the lawns in tricky conditions and Gill helping Andrew with the lunches. We were all left wondering why such a fantastic venue did not offer more AC tournaments during the season.... food for thought!



David Maugham is the champion of the East and the North

by Ian Lines

A full field of 16 gathered at Bowdon for the North of England Championship. It was the strongest entry for many years, with 12 minus players and 7 players with handicaps of -2 or lower. It was particularly good to see some entries from further afield, including Gavin Carter from Jersey and Aaron Westerby from New Zealand, on his 4th visit to Bowdon over the last 30 years, but the first time he had played.

The lawns were relatively easy after all the rain in the north-west, but reasonably tight hoops provided a good challenge.

Unusually, there were some upsets for the 8 seeds on the first day. Simon Jenkins and Tudor Jenkins won their matches against Joel Taylor and Gavin Carter respectively, and David Maugham, Debbie Lines and Ian Lines all had to come back after losing their first games in best-of-threes to beat Paul Rigge, James Hawkins and Neil Adams respectively. The rest of the event had fewer upsets, and David Maugham and Aaron Westerby progressed to the final with relative ease. The final was closely fought, with just one or two errors by each, but perhaps David had the advantage over Aaron of having played hundreds of games at Bowdon over the years, and David ended up winning the Faulkner Cup +26tp, +15, +16tp.

The next best 8 competitors played a knockout for the Tollemache Plate, and in the final Dave Kibble beat Joel Taylor +16. Other games of note included a +26sxp by Gavin Carter against Mike Sandler and a +4otpt win for Gabrielle Higgins against Tudor Jenkins. The deciding game of the final of the East of England Championship at Wrest Park between Debbie Lines and David Maugham was deemed to be the first game of their semi-final, which David won +11tp, so Mike Sandler was able to present the trophies for two Regionals.

The players enjoyed reasonable weather and an excellent dinner on Saturday evening at the Griffin, and were kept well supplied with tea and cake throughout.



DENNIS

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Discover



The National Seniors' Association Croquet Tournament

by Chris Donovan

The tournament started on Monday 15th July, St Swithan's Day, with the Met Office's forecast of torrential rain. The event concluded on Saturday with the Met Office again predicting torrential rain. Monday's weather reflected the ameliorating effect of the Budleigh Salterton micro-climate and the day was only mildly affected by light, short, scattered showers. Perhaps it will only rain for 20 days in Budleigh – not the full forty? Saturday, however, was a grey, dismal 'soft Devon' day with continuous drizzle interspersed with heavier showers.

A week before the tournament a doubles player decided to manhandle large garden pots. His senior's physique was unimpressed with this strenuous exercise and left him swallowing pain killers and trying to stand up straight. He and partner withdrew; a grateful manager then had 10 pairs rather than the really awkward 11 pairs. Two blocks of 5 played 2 hour 22 point Advanced handicap games with a final on Tuesday morning between the two block winners.

There is no reference to 22 point games in Tournament Regulations for a standard time so 2 hours was set to get the games played in the time available. This did not deter 'discussion' of match duration - isn't 'AMD' a useful expression! It was a novel game for some and caused confusion for 'some' players playing across to hoop 1 rather than turning up through Hoop 5. However, a result was achieved. Patricia Mulcahy [14] and Paul Franklin [16], both from Phyllis Court, were runners-up with Joe King [-1 Blewbury] and Duncan Reeve [-2 Budleigh] winning +4TP. King took a doubles cup and Reeve a photo as, yet again, a trophy was not delivered.

The weather turned to hot sun in blue skies on Tuesday. This happy ambience was enhanced when the players were 'delighted' to hear that the Handicap Singles was also to be 2 hour 22 point games, although standard not advanced. Four blocks of 5, all including 2 minus players, commenced play. Block A players utterly disgraced themselves by presenting the manager with a 3 way non-resolvable tie. As advised in the event's notice board details (does any player actually, ever read these?), a coin toss decided Patricia Mulcahy as the block winner. The three other blocks behaved themselves and delivered clear winners: Neil Adams [-1 Crake Valley], David Marsh [-1.5 Wrest Park] and Joe King.

In the semi-finals Mulcahy beat Marsh [+22] and Adams beat King [+11]. In the final Adams laid a 'Duffer's Tice' which, seemingly, caused some consternation and initiated somewhat rapid, 'bisque burning'. Consequently, Mulcahy ran out of bisques and Adams' experience and minus handicap brought him the Quiller Cup.

Class play started Thursday lunchtime with a block of 9 for the A Class, two blocks of 8 for the B & C Class and a small D block of 4. All received order of play / lawn allocation slips for their class play, as they had for the doubles and handicap singles, and were told to 'get on with it', report and insert the results ASAP but don't bother the manager until prize giving on Saturday – it almost worked!

This tournament entry suffered from the increasingly common entry make-up of a preponderance of minus handicaps and strong 'B Level' players but a dearth of handicap 8 / 9 upwards. This makes reasonable block selection with appropriate games rather tricky. Are we really seeing the rapid demise of AC?

Anyway, it was good to see Mulcahy and Franklin playing in the Class event having had their handicaps, respectively 14 & 16 reduced by Chris Robert [0 Phyllis Court] to 11 & 12. This reduction may need review as Franklin went on to win 5 of his 6 games and took the Nigel Graves Trophy.

The C Block of 8 played for the de Ansorena Cup. Geraldine O'Rourke [8 Carrickmines] was able to confirm that Fernando Ansorena from Jerez in Spain, the sherry producing area, had presented the plated sherry schooner and used to be a regular player at CA events.

The block's last game could have produced another unsolvable 4 way tie but Chris Donovan [2.5 Sidmouth] beat Paul Watson [2 Cheltenham] to win 5 matches. Robert Upton also won a 5th game, so it came to 'who beat whom'.

In round 3 Upton had taken and held an early lead against Donovan, but fluffed the rover peel. Donovan had an easy hit in and caught-up with a barely lined-up 'cheeky' 4 back peel and got to peg. Upton shot and missed. Donovan hit in and was only able to peg-out one ball – 3 minutes to go - wise? Upton just missed his roquet but was next to his partner ball. Donovan shoots and ends up on the south boundary. Upton manages to run rover but hasn't got the angle to peg out both balls so pegs out one but leaves his partner ball 10 inches from the peg giving Donovan a long shot at a double – peg / ball. Donovan hits the ball and pegs out to win plus 1 on time and took home the Ansorena cup for the second year running.

The B Block of 8 played for the Colin Hemming Cup and this was completely dominated by Chris Roberts, net hoops 120 and 7

wins. As usual Roberts rushed off to play for the Welsh GC team and Frances Colman [10 Phyllis Court] collected the cup on his behalf.

The A Class, 9 players, -2.5 to -0.5, saw 17 triples and one quad with all games bar one played on the once again rainy Saturday. Chris Williams [-1.5 Glamorgan] won 6 games, including beating Maugham 26 – 10, but with 7 wins, including 5 triples and a quad, David Maugham [-2.5 Bowdon] was the clear winner. He was pleased to take the Trevor Williams Cup having won the Juniors equivalent some years ago. During the week Maugham also ensured he took home the usual glass-based awards for the fastest handicap singles game - 35 minutes and slowed down considerably for the fastest class game taking a huge 45 minutes.

Prize giving was indoors as Saturday’s weather drizzled and showered unabatedly. The early finishers and winners: Doubles, Handicap Singles, A Class Trevor Williams, B Class Colin Hemming and D Class Nigel Graves Trophy were not detained unduly with a less than well organised presentation during lunch – however, all seemed happy enough. And that’s the aim isn’t it – lots of play in good company in superb surroundings, so what’s a bit of rain?



Images left to right

- Colin Hemming Cup- Frances Colman for Chris Roberts
- de Ansorena Cup- Donovan presents himself
- Doubles Runner-Ups- Paul Franklin and Patricia Mulcahy
- Handicap Singles- Neil Adams
- Nigel Graves Trophy- Paul Franklin
- Trevor Williams Cup- David Maugham
- Doubles Winners- Duncan Reeve & Joe King

CHELTENHAM HIGH BISQUE

by Adam Moliver- Manager

Players from six clubs played in this long-running annual event.

Day one was organised as three eighteen-point games leading to block winners who, on Day Two, played in semi-finals and final of twenty-six points.

All games were full bisque, reduced on day one for 18 points, off a base of 5.

As has become our standard format, those who did not get through to the semi-finals had coached games on the morning of Day Two with some more formal coaching in the afternoon on bisque-taking, break-building and shot-making. This was followed by a fourteen-point game to put some of the learning into practice, finishing in time to see the end of the Final.

The final was between Karen Newbould (Bromley and Spain) and Margaret Murray (Kington Langley).

A close match was won on time by Karen 25-20.

This event is run to introduce high-handicap AC players to tournament play in a friendly and supportive way and use the coach/ref observations on the first day to inform the coaching element on the second day.

A number of players had a background in GC and this was apparent in some excellent hoop-running.

Peter Stone, Darryl Whitehead and Manager Adam Moliver were supervising referees (i.e. not waiting to be asked), and Adam and Darryl were the coaches (Adam also made the cakes!).



Club President
James Death
presents trophy to
winner Karen
Newbould

Croquet England is proud to be working with partners who care about the development and success of our sport and our community. We are grateful for their support and welcome their expertise, which we can share with you.



ROUND OR SQUARE?

by Chris Alvey, DB Mallets

Over the course of this season, I have been asked on several occasions are round or square mallets better and what would I recommend. The simple answer is I have no idea!

We both play with different mallets; Anne's is a square cross section (technically a rectangle) and mine is a hybrid, with round bottom and top, but flat sides. I've read the articles written by people more experienced than I, and they generally say the square cross-section has a few minor advantages:

1. Severely hampered shots are slightly easier with a square section end face.
2. If you mis-hit and strike the ball lower on the face than expected (i.e. you top it) the shot is more likely to still go in a straight line, albeit with less power.
3. A square mallet doesn't generally fall over when you let go of it.

(Summarised from <https://croquetdev.com/mallets.html> accessed 11/09/2024)

For point 3 you can roll your foot over a dropped round mallet head, flicking the handle back up and into your hand, (although I would recommend trying this before doing it with an audience to avoid embarrassment).

Personally, I am a firm believer in selecting a mallet that is right for you. Round or square is a personal choice. Anne and I have swapped mallets on several occasions, and we can play the same shots with the same control with either design.

Where the round head can come in handy is helping players that find themselves digging the leading face of the mallet into the lawn, or those with a fear of this after doing it once. Give a round headed mallet a go. One with a longer head will also often help as it means you can stand a little further back, and the mallet is starting to rise as it strikes the ball.



LAWN MAINTENANCE MATTERS

by Duncan Hector, www.duncanhectorturfcare.co.uk

BURSTING THE BUBBLE

Does maintaining croquet lawns (excluding mowing) require a great deal of hard work and a huge amount of knowledge? Is recognising weeds or naming a particular fungal attack important? Is it Fusarium, Take All Patch, Anthracnose or something else? I hate to burst the bubble but weeds are weeds and weed killers that you can buy from your local garden centre kill virtually all of them. So knowing which ones you are killing doesn't matter. Fungal attacks are the same and very easy to control with no skill or special knowledge, no certificates or expertise, no training and no toxic chemicals or fungicides. All of them can be controlled by using Soluble Iron at a cost of around £5 per full size croquet lawn.

What about scarifying? I have been banging on about this for years. Most fertilisers used by contractors and recommended in journals and online have fancy names and loads of complicated jargon. But on a basic level they are mostly synthetic. At this level they are low cost to make but the sales spiel talks them up into a different realm. Synthetic fertilisers contain all the nutrients specified on the bag but they will usually cause a build up of thatch in the rootzone causing a spongy slow surface. For this reason the lawns have to be scarified to remove thatch (dead organic matter). To satisfy the low end of the market, I now offer synthetic fertiliser and it is great for the outfield where thatch doesn't matter. My main business is concentrated on Organic based fertilisers some of which contain a whole array of bacteria and mycorrhizal fungi to break down thatch in the root zone. Using these fertilisers costs more but produces faster lawns with little or no additional work. The result? Maintenance bliss! See my website and Turfpedia for the answers to virtually all maintenance questions.

Duncan Hector
Turf Care

GC Inter-County Championships

SOMERSET AND LINCOLNSHIRE TAKE THE HONOURS

by Jonathan Powe

The GC Inter-Counties was held over the weekend 17-18 August. Twenty counties took part. Division 1 (twelve counties) was at Sussex CCC, while Division 2 (eight counties) was at Cheltenham.

Division 1 is always a fun event, and so it proved again this year. Fine weather, some great hospitality from Sussex County and a friendly festival atmosphere helped, but there was also some excellent, competitive croquet throughout the weekend, plus an exciting winner-takes-all final round.

The format of the event is straightforward; an all-play-all round-robin over 12 rounds (includes a preliminary round); each match comprises two singles and one doubles (all single 13-point games); and the number of singles and doubles games played by each player may not differ by more than one game.

Nottinghamshire (Rachel Gee, Will Gee, Ian Burrridge, Arthur Rowe) were the clear pre-event favourites having won in 2021, 2022 and 2023, but a number of other counties - in particular Dorset, Devon, Somerset and Yorkshire - had strong line-ups, so it was by no means a foregone conclusion.

In the end, it became a three-horse race between Notts, Somerset and Essex.

Essex (Tony Butcher, Tim King, Alison Maugham, Liz Drury) punched well above their weight and looked very good on Saturday, winning their first five matches, including against Somerset. They then stumbled slightly against some of the stronger teams, losing three of their next four matches (to Yorks, Notts and Devon) which meant they were out of the running for the title, but still finished in 3rd place overall, with eight wins from their 11 matches.

Meanwhile, Notts made their way serenely through the early rounds, finishing on Saturday evening on 6/6 (five of them 3-0). They continued in that vein for the first two rounds on Sunday before losing a tight match against Yorkshire (all sporting flat caps), which was decided at the 13th hoop in the final game. This left Notts on 9/10 prior to their final round against Somerset.

Despite their loss to Essex in the 5th round, Somerset (David Goacher, Dom Aarvold, Andy Loakes, Neil Fillery, Colin Britt, Stephen Custance-Baker) also looked on excellent form, dropping only a handful of games throughout the weekend and ending up on 9/10 prior to the final deciding round against Notts.

The line-up for the 'final' between Notts and Somerset was (Notts first): Rachel Gee (-3) v David Goacher (-2);



Photo of Somerset (Div 1 winners). L to R: Andy Loakes, David Goacher, Stephen Custance-Baker, Colin Britt, Dom Aarvold, Neil Fillery.

Will Gee (-2) v Dom Aarvold (-1); Ian Burrridge (-2) & Arthur Rowe (-1) v Andy Loakes (-1) & Colin Britt (0). In the doubles, Somerset raced off to an early lead and were soon 5-1 up. Despite Notts stemming the tide, Somerset took the game 7-3 in relatively short order. Meanwhile on the adjacent lawn, Rachel was leading in her game against David, while Will was struggling against an in-form Dom. While Rachel saw out her game 7-3, it was Dom who ran the 11th hoop to prevail against Will 7-4, meaning that Somerset took the GC Inter-Counties title, having won ten of their eleven matches. Somerset have won Div 1 once before, in 2019.

Northamptonshire (3/11) and Buckinghamshire (2/11) were left at the foot of the table and will join Division 2 in Cheltenham next year.

Huge thanks are due to the team at Sussex CCC for providing great lawns and such splendid fare throughout the weekend. Much appreciated as ever! We look forward to returning next year.

GC Inter-County Championships

FROM DIVISION 2

by Roy Tillcock
Debutant Manager (relieved!)

New boys and odds-on favourites Lincolnshire duly completed an undefeated 7-match masterclass to gain promotion to Division 1 along with worthy runners-up Oxfordshire. In a classic final match between both unbeaten teams the title was finally decided by the closest 4 games to 3 margin in front of an appreciative crowd lining the Cheltenham club house. Leicestershire took a well deserved third place with five wins against the also-rans (Berkshire, Glamorgan, Hampshire, Surrey and Shropshire/Hereford) all on 2 wins and ordered by net games.

Thanks as ever must go to the Cheltenham grounds team who had prepared eight medium to fast courts with firm and unforgiving Ultra hoops throughout the two days. Weather was fine and dry providing all in all ideal playing conditions for the event. This year seven counties entered a team in their own right along with a combined entry from Shropshire and Hereford, which for once meant there was no need to invoke a CA select or other artifice to maintain the format. Unfortunately, despite a valiant effort by their captains, the combined team required a late infusion of unqualified players and were thus ruled out for promotion.

The match format played on two courts in two rounds, one double and two singles followed by four singles, required a total of eight, yes eight, rounds to be played on Saturday and six on Sunday. By any stretch of the imagination at this level, even with a 60 minute time-limit, that's "full on" to quote my predecessor Ivor Brand. Every credit must go to the team captains for their advance scheduling and real time allocation of resources throughout the two days, without which the timetable could never have been kept to. I was delighted and most surprised to be able to sign off on Saturday by 19.30 with all games completed. The pace flagged a little on Sunday, perhaps understandably with a mere six rounds to play, and final games staggering to a finish over a one hour period to 18.00.



Photo of Lincolnshire Div 2 winners). L to R: Richard Bilton, Aston Wade (captain), Euan BurrIDGE, Callum Johnson

Many players regard the Counties as more of a festival with a competitive edge than the reverse and were troubled by the intensity of the playing schedule coupled with no specific allowance for refreshment breaks throughout the day. We are most grateful to the Cheltenham caterers who went to great lengths to provide a BBQ lunch to order and a splendid afternoon tea as and when players were available. It is a matter of regret though that not everyone who wished to was able to take full advantage.

I must also thank Richard Bilton for keeping on top of Croquet Scores for me and trust that he and his tournament team will take another look at providing a more welcoming format in the future for the players for whom Division 2 is intended. I understand the problems and there is no easy solution but the reality is, that with 4 players in a team, Division 2 are required to play 50% more games per team than Division 1.

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Croquet Player
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A Festival of Golf Croquet

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF THE INTER-COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIPS

by Klim Seabright

I would encourage you to update your county qualifications on the website for the Inter-County (AC and GC) Championships. The play is serious but the atmosphere often has a lighter touch, it's a "festival" of croquet. Why don't you form a new team if necessary - surely there must be players who can claim Rutland as a qualification? I can only really speak from first-hand experience of the GC event...but go on... enter. Perhaps the demand will make a case for a third division based "up north"?

Speaking of "up north" weren't Yorkshire resplendent in their smart blue tops? They also injected a certain joie de vivre in which they rallied around their flag, pinned to their mini-cycle, although how they managed to get all five "Tykes on their Bikes" and peddle from York defies belief.



The Essex girls were in red and very smart they looked. Devon had nice green tops but perhaps a little more yellow in the green would give it a lift? Even Somerset (eventual winners) looked good in their monogrammed white tops. If that does not make a strong case for single coloured tops I don't know what will.

Sussex County is to be congratulated on arranging the RAF Memorial fly past on Saturday. I suppose the budget would not stretch to the Red Arrows... or does the red top disbar them?

There was good "audience participation" which is not usually observed at other events. I heard loud applause and also whoops and cheers when someone pulled off a spectacular shot. Eugene Chang jumped at least four feet in the air to greet a Yorkshire win.

Praise must be given to the catering team who kept us well supplied all day. This included the lady "staffing" the barbecue (probably not allowed to say "manning"). I was



playing on the lawn nearby and heard a loud "POP" as she lit up. Fortunately she has retained her eyebrows and eyelashes.

I hope the person(s) who designed and built the score board has been given a CqE Diploma. The board consists of a series of hooks placed horizontally against each county name. There are a number of small wooden tablets containing any combination of the numbers nought to three, which are placed on the board after each round (each round consisting of three matches). This combines woodworking and mathematical skills. Should anyone suggest replacing this with the latest technology then please ignore them.

I have always thought that a significant number of croquet players have a mathematical/actuarial background... so...bear with me... that probably means a good number are also musical? Bring your instrument for some evening entertainment next time. Let's create our own "Glasto".

Why not add a few days to your visit? In Cheltenham go and take a look at the hill used for cheese rolling. To enter you need outstanding courage and a low IQ.



In Brighton you will be able to discover the "Bus Street"... I did! Seriously though the villages a little way in from the coast are delightful. Come on... get involved... a great team atmosphere... "SUCH FUN".

GC Open Championships

by Richard Bilton

The Sussex County Croquet Club once again hosted the GC Open Championships this year, this time with their own brand new Quadway hoops. Many thanks go to the club volunteers for preparing the lawns and looking after the catering. On Friday, the players enjoyed a barbecue for lunch and fish and chips in the evening.

DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIP

In Block A, second seeds Jamie Burch & Aston Wade had the best time, as they only lost to the first and third seeds, but beat everyone else to finish top with 6 wins and better net hoops than the third seed pair Jack Good & Will Gee, who were also on 6 wins, having beaten everyone except the bottom two pairs. Reg Bamford & Tobi Savage came third with 5 wins. Two pairs finished with 4 wins, but John Taylor & Kevin Connolly took the final place in the knockout as they had better net hoops than Stuart M Smith & Steve Leonard.



Block B saw third seeds Richard Bilton & Dom Nunns finish top as they were unbeaten after the first day, but lost the last block game in the morning to Lionel Tibble & Guy Scurfield, who came fourth. Stephen Mulliner and Jenny Clarke were seeded second and finished second, even though they had the same wins and net hoops as the top pair, having lost to them. Top seeds Chris Clarke & Ian Burridge came third, losing only to the top two pairs.

As the blocks needed to be finished on the second morning, there was no time for any playoffs, and the quarter-finals had to be a single 19pt game. Bamford & Savage beat Mulliner & Clarke 10-6. The other three quarter-finals were won 10-7 – Burch & Wade beat Tibble & Scurfield, Bilton & Nunns beat Taylor & Connolly, and Good & Gee beat Clarke & Burridge.

Good & Gee were on form in their match against Bilton & Nunns. They were in the lead all the way in game 1, and Bilton & Nunns had their nose in front in game 2 until Gee ran hoop 8 clean from corner 2. Good & Gee won both games 7-5. The other semi-final was a similar story. Bamford & Savage were the better pair and comfortably beat Burch & Wade 7-4, 7-5.

In the final, Good & Gee were unable to maintain the form that got them there, and Bamford & Savage only got better. Their games complemented each other nicely and Bamford's strength of positional play, and Savage's strength of clearing, were both on point. This led to them beating the current National Doubles champions 7-4, 7-5. They were awarded the recently rediscovered and revamped Delves Broughton Golf Croquet Challenge Cup.

The remaining pairs were placed into a single game knockout for the Plate. Eduardo & Angel Nunez beat Tim Jolliff & Tim Russell 10-7 in the final. Mulliner & Clarke beat Clarke & Burridge 10-9 to win the Shield.

SINGLES CHAMPIONSHIP

BLOCK A

Bamford knows how to start well, and won his first game of the event 7-0. Marcus Evans nearly beat Sam Murray 2-0, but lost the first game 7-6, and ended up losing game three 7-1. He had a tough day because the third seeds have to play both players above them on day 1, and he unfortunately lost 2-0 to both Bamford and Wade. The top two seeds were unbeaten after day 1, Bamford not dropping a game, and Ian Burridge beat Murray to leave both on 2 wins.

Bamford again started well as he won his first match of the day 7-0, 7-0. Burridge beat Wade, despite losing the middle game 7-0. Bamford finished day 2 on 6 wins, but having dropped 2 games along the way. After not winning a match on the first day, Evans came back and won all three on day 2, and went on to take the final match on Saturday morning to finish in fourth place with 4 wins, and earn a place in the knockout. Burridge and Wade finished on 5 wins, with the latter taking second position on net games. Bamford won the block outright with 7 wins. Bamford and Louise Smith had an unusual situation when a ball jammed in a hoop in trying to remove it from the jaws from behind.

BLOCK B

Most matches in the first round went to seeding, except that Eduardo Nunez beat Bilton 2-0. Bilton wasn't playing badly, but Nunez was performing 200-300 points above his current grade of 2210. In round 2, every match went to seeding. Bilton didn't let this first round loss get to him as he won his other two matches that day, and found top gear against Dom Aarvold. Stuart Smith had a drop in form against Bilton, which continued into his match against J-P Moberly, and finished the day on only 1 win. Moberly and Nunez won all three matches on day 1.

GC Open Championships continued

On the second morning, Moberly found out how good Nunez is, as he lost the first game 7-2 and had to play at his best to win the next two. On the second afternoon, the match between Richard Brooks and Giles Pepperell had to be pegged down at 1-1 to allow the round 6 matches to be played before the fish and chips arrived. At the end of day 2, Moberly was still unbeaten, Nunez was second and Bilton third, and all were guaranteed places in the knockout. The last place would be taken by the winner of the match between Smith and Aarvold, and it was Smith who won in 2 games to finish fourth. The other three won their matches to retain their positions.

BLOCK C

The shock of the first day was when Chris Roberts (seed 6) beat top seed Mulliner, who then also lost to Euan Burrridge to finish day 1 with one win. At the end of the day, Burrridge and Callum Johnson were joined by Roberts on 2 wins, and Good had won all three matches 2-0. On day 2, Good lost his first game to Johnson, but won the rest to remain unbeaten. Mulliner won his first to stay in the picture, but lost the next to Good.

Burrridge and Johnson have met in the Opens block stage a few times now, and the pattern continued as Johnson convincingly won 2-0. With those two on 3 wins, Roberts on 4, and Good unbeaten, top seed Mulliner was in danger of not qualifying for the knockout. However, being top seed, he only had the bottom two left to play, and he beat both 2-0 to get to 4 wins. Johnson went into the final round on 4 wins, as did Burrridge and Roberts, though they were still to play each other. Good wasted no time in dispatching Scurfield 2-0 to take top spot. Johnson came second with 5 wins, and Burrridge beat Roberts to finish third, also with 5 wins. This meant Mulliner and Roberts were tied on 4 wins, so had a playoff for fourth position, which Mulliner won 7-3.

BLOCK D

As mentioned earlier, the third seeds have a difficult first day, and Savage won his first match against seed 7, but then lost 2-0 to seeds 1 and 2. Conversely, Mark Avery and Tibble both lost their first match, but won their next two, albeit against seeds 7 and 8. The top two seeds, Burch and Jenny Clarke, both finished the first day with 3 wins, despite Clarke forfeiting a lead to lose the first game of her last match 7-6. Even though she came back to win the next two 7-0, 7-2, she was still last to finish.

Two days in a row, Savage started by losing his first game 7-6 before waking up and winning the next two comfortably. Having continued their unbeaten run, the match between the top two seeds went to Clarke. Burch only just recovered as he then narrowly beat Luis Alvarez-Sala by 7-6, 7-6. Whereas Clarke only dropped 5 hoops in her next two matches. At the end of day 2, Clarke, Burch and Savage were the top three, and should remain there. It looked like fourth place would be decided in the last round match between Avery and Tibble. Indeed, Burch beat the eighth seed – but not without losing the first game of the day 7-1, Clarke came top, and what was potentially the longest match of the event was won 2-1 by Savage. Tibble beat Avery in 3 games to claim the fourth spot.

CHAMPIONSHIP

The draw for the knockout was conducted while Mulliner and Roberts were in their playoff, and when they came off, Mulliner found out that he was drawn to play long-time rival Bamford. Bamford was definitely the more in form player of the two, but Mulliner is never going to make it easy for his opponent. Bamford was the more solid player in game 3 and won 7-4, 5-7, 7-2. The two young big hitters were drawn to play each other in the first round, and it was a very close match with Euan Burrridge beating Nunez 7-6, 6-7, 7-5. Burch and Bilton had a close first game, with the latter being in front all the way and being first to 13, but never getting a shot at it. After that, nothing went Bilton's way and Burch won 7-6, 7-2. Good was the better player in his match, as he beat Evans 7-1, 6-7, 7-3.

After being unbeaten in her block, Clarke came up against Smith who had found some form going into the knockout, and he won 4-7, 7-5, 7-4. The closest match of the round was between Wade and Savage. Both players were at the top of their game, and the result was a repeat of the Roehampton Open Final earlier in the month, as Savage won 7-6, 6-7, 7-6 with a boundary 13 to finish. At the bottom of the first round were two quite convincing matches, as Johnson disposed of Ian Burrridge 7-3, 7-3, and Moberly dispatched Tibble 7-4, 7-3.

In round 2, Savage probably hadn't recovered from his close battle and Smith continued his good form. Their match was over surprisingly quickly as Smith won comfortably 7-5, 7-2. Equally surprising was the unbeaten Moberly losing to Johnson 7-5, 7-



Golf Croquet Open Champion 2024 Jamie Burch, receiving the trophy from Stephen Mulliner

GC Open Championships continued

2. The match between Good and Burch was close, although they only played 2 games. Good had a chance to win both, but missed attempts at both final hoops allowed Burch to win 7-6, 7-5. Arguably the match with the highest standard of play from the whole event was the only quarter-final that went to three games. In game 1, after Bamford had played first to 13, he moved his other ball a matter of inches to block Burridge's second clearance (Euan having missed with the first). However, a well-executed jump-clearance got Burridge back into the hoop and he went on to steal the game. The high standard continued as both played by far the best they had in the event. In the end, it was 12-time winner Bamford that prevailed 6-7, 7-4, 7-5.

Burch started the final day much better than he did the day before and creamed Bamford in game 1. The momentum completely swung in game 2 and Bamford returned the favour. Game 3 was closer, but Bamford wasn't hitting as straight as in his previous match, and Burch was as consistent as ever. Bamford lost his first match of the event at the hands of Burch 7-3, 2-7, 7-5, ensuring a new name for the trophy. The other semi-final was no less competitive. Smith recovered from a 2-5 deficit to pinch the first game. The second game was even closer, and anybody could have won at hoop 13. After a fiddly situation with the balls all close to each other and the hoop, there wasn't much Johnson could do with a shot except play away and hope Smith would fail the hoop. Unfortunately for him, he didn't, and with that Smith secured the match 7-5, 7-6.

Neither player performed as well in the final as they did to get there. Even considering that the hoops were in new holes for the last day, there were a lot being missed by both finalists. Burch was still the more consistent of the two, and was always in front. Smith kept hanging on and was never far behind, but trading hoops isn't enough when behind. Burch took the lead in both games and went about maintaining it, which was enough for him to win 7-5, 7-4, and be crowned GC Open Singles Champion.

Jamie Burch was the fifth new name on the trophy since 2021, when the domination of Bamford and Mulliner came to an end. The GC Open Championships will be taking a break from Southwick and returning to Budleigh Salterton in 2025.

BOWL & SHIELD

Tibble played Ian Burridge in the first round of the Bowl (contested by knockout first-round losers) on Saturday evening. It was another match in which the momentum swung a few times, as Burridge won 7-3, 3-7, 7-4. Mulliner & Nunez played each other in the other first round match, and it was another close encounter. At 1-1, they decided to call it a day and resume in the morning. After a heated battle, Nunez won 7-6, 6-7, 7-6. Straight into the next round, he went to hoop 13 again in the first game against Evans. The next two games were a complete reversal, and Evans won 6-7, 7-1, 7-4. Burridge had to wait for them to finish so got to have a late start, and it seems this went against him in game 1 as his opponent was already in full flow. However, Burridge fought back to beat Evans 2-7, 7-5, 7-6 and win the Bowl. Good claimed the Shield (contested by losing quarter-finalists) without hitting a ball as the other potential players opted to head home.

PLATE & SAUCER

Avery, Leonard, Louise Smith and Raouf Allim made it through the early rounds of the Plate on Saturday afternoon to reach the semis on Sunday. Both matches were close, although Leonard couldn't keep up in game 3, allowing Avery to win 5-7, 7-5, 7-1. Meanwhile Smith played well to beat Allim 7-5, 6-7, 7-4. Smith took this form into the final, where she did extremely well to beat Avery in 2 games 7-5, 7-3 to win the Plate. The Saucer (contested by first round losers in the Plate) was won

BURY CROQUET CLUB ANNUAL ASSOCIATION FUN DAY

by Roy Spencer

23 Members - all colourfully dressed took part in the Annual AC Fun day at Whitehead Park on Saturday 17th August. This day had to be cancelled last year due to monsoon conditions, so it was pleasing that this long established popular event in the club calendar took place this year in dry but mixed conditions. The aim of the day is to encourage non AC or inexperienced players to play fun AC-based games along with experienced players.

A great day introducing AC strokes and techniques to some open-minded GC players, really enjoyed in great spirits by all taking part, efficiently organised by Anne & Chris Alvey.



English National GC Doubles

by Jonathan Powe

It was a super weekend at Budleigh for the GC National Doubles 27-28 July - excellent lawns, lovely weather, wonderful hospitality, a delicious fish & chip supper on Saturday night, and some highly competitive croquet, all in a very friendly atmosphere.

We had a strong field. The top 11 (of 16) pairs all had average grades above 2000 and two of the pairs were previous winners of the Ranelagh Cups (Stuart M Smith & Steve Leonard (2020) and Ivor & Richard Brand (1997, 1999)). Also in the line-up were three players who had won in the past with other players (Louise Smith, Jonathan Powe and Stephen Custance-Baker) and we were joined by three high-quality pairings: Chris Clarke & Helen Reeves, Sam Cuthbert & James Death and Jenny Clarke & Roger Goldring.



The format for the event was pretty standard - two all-play-all qualifying blocks on Saturday (7 rounds) followed by best-of-3 quarters, semis and final on Sunday alongside the Plate and Bowl.

There were few surprises in Block A. C Clarke & Reeves were seeded #1 in the block and took the top slot, losing only one of their 7 games. The other three quarter-final places went to seeds 2-4: J Clarke & Goldring with 5/7 wins; Colin Britt & Andy Loakes (4/7); and (by the skin of their teeth) Powe & Tim Russell (3/7).

The battle for the top four places in Block B was less straightforward. Both the #1 seed in the block (Smith & Leonard) and #3 seed (Raouf Allim & Tim Jolliff) struggled throughout the day, ending up 6th (3/7) and 8th (0/7) respectively. Conversely, Cuthbert & Death (#2) looked in complete control in all their games and took first place (7/7). The other three places in the Championship Knockout were taken by Jon Carrington & Stuart Smith, Stephen Custance-Baker & Neil Fillery and Kevin Connolly & John Taylor, all on 4/7.

On Sunday, the Plate was concluded by mid-afternoon with an impressive win and welcome return to form for Smith & Leonard, who beat the Brand brothers 2-0 in the final.

The Championship Knockout quarters and semis went to the higher seeded pairs, which set up an intriguing final between C Clarke & Reeves and Cuthbert & Death. Clarke & Reeves went ahead in both games, but Cuthbert & Death always looked the more dangerous pair, and so it proved. James's clearances throughout the match were extremely impressive (nothing was safe) and Sam looked very strong, with some excellent hoop-running and jump shots. They made an excellent pair, and thoroughly deserved their 7-4, 7-2 win to take the Ranelagh Cups.

In the Bowl (for losing quarter-finalists), Connolly & Taylor won a very tight final against Custance-Baker & Fillery 7-6, 7-6.

The Saucer (13th-16th) was won by Frances Colman & Chris Roberts, who beat Adam & Andrew Wimshurst (combined age 161) 6-7, 7-4, 7-4.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS

Continued from page 30

10 mins - Duncan Meachin (score as many hoops as possible using AC strokes with partner, endless bisques - but deducted from total score).

Flamingos - Margaret Eccles & Ken Eccles (short lawn format but when a hoop is run chance card drawn - can be good or bad!).

Target take - off challenge - Margaret Eccles (hit target using take off stroke - highest score in 5 minutes)

Crollky - Richard Leach (Mölkky (Kubb) but with croquet balls & mallets)



Photos by Ian Saunders & Roy Spencer

GC Eights

by Richard Bilton

Budleigh Salterton Croquet Club hosted both the First and Second Eights once again this year, this time with Quadway hoops on all 8 courts. The courts were playing well, despite the heavy rain overnight on Friday. Fortunately, there were enough playable courts by 10am that all first-round matches could start, and double banking the first round meant there was no delay to the event, and everyone finished by 7pm in time for the fish and chips.

It shows how the game of Golf Croquet is still being taken to new levels as the field for the First Eight continues to get younger. Half of the players were under 25 and Richard Bilton, who has often been the youngest player at events, was in the older half. In the end, the second youngest player at the venue, Sam Cuthbert, won the Second Eight, and the youngest player, Jack Good, won the First Eight, beating the third youngest player, Aston Wade. Jack finished the event ranked UK number 1 and World number 4.

It was great that the Budleigh members came to see the top-level play in action on the bank holiday. During the Finals, there were over 40 non-playing spectators. Huge thanks go to all the club members and volunteers for making the tournament a great success, from preparing the lawns and setting the hoops, to running the bar and organising the catering. We look forward to coming back for the GC Open Championships in 2025.



2024- Jack Good (1st Eight winner) & Sam Cuthbert (2nd Eight winner) with trophies at Budleigh (by Chris Roberts)



Third Eights winner Tim Jolliff

GC First Eight: The Ricki Savage Memorial

By Richard Bilton

The players competing in the First Eight (Ricki Savage Memorial) were (in seeding order): Jack Good (Bowdon), Aston Wade (Hurlingham), Stuart M Smith (Budleigh), Stephen Mulliner (Surbiton), Callum Johnson (York), Euan Burrridge (Nottingham), Richard Bilton (Gainsborough) and Ian Burrridge (Nottingham).

Good started well, and despite a slight dip in game 2, which could have allowed Mulliner to level at 1-1, he was let off and won his first match 2-0. It was a similar story in the double-banked match between Smith and Bilton, although Bilton allowed Smith to get back in the match and take it to

three games, although still losing the next. The two Burridges played each other in the first round, and Ian took the first game, though Euan managed to come back and win the match at hoop 13 in game three. Perhaps the most unexpected result of the round was Johnson beating Wade in 2 straight games.

In the next round, Good continued his form and beat E Burrridge 2-0. Smith took the first game in his match 7-4, before Wade ran away with it and won the next two 7-0, 7-3. Mulliner comfortably beat I Burrridge in 2 games. Bilton had everything going for him in game 2 against Johnson, but ultimately lost game three at hoop 13.

Wade and E Burrridge contested a well-fought 3 games which

GC FIRST EIGHT CONTINUED

eventually went to Wade. Johnson lost his first match, and I Burridge won his first, in a close 3-game match. Bilton lost in 2 games to Mulliner, after having a good lead in both. Good lost his first game at the start of his match with Smith, but managed to come back from behind in the following games and win both at hoop 13. This meant that, at the end of the first day's play, Good was the only player to have won all three matches.

At the start of day 2, Good lost another game, and nearly a match, as he narrowly beat Johnson 7-6 in game 3. Wade made light work in beating Mulliner 7-2, 7-4. Despite losing the middle game 7-3, I Burridge was able to beat Smith in 3 games. E Burridge lost the first game against Bilton, but went all out attack to win game 2 and a few costly errors from Bilton lost him the third game.

The match between the top two seeds was quicker than expected, as Good continued his unbeaten run with a 2-0 win against Wade. Unlike in most of their recent meetings, E Burridge easily beat Johnson in 2 games. Although losing the middle game 7-6, Mulliner was the better player in his match against Smith. The quality of play between Bilton and I Burridge went up and down like a yo-yo, and it was Bilton that edged the win at hoop 13 in game 3.

Smith won the first game against Johnson, running 13 from the boundary, after Johnson had missed from 4 feet, but Johnson upped his game to level the match and comfortably won game 3. The other three matches at the end of the second day were all 2 games. Bilton was more consistent, but it wasn't enough against Good, Wade saw off I Burridge, and E Burridge dispatched Mulliner.

Going into the final day, 6 out of 8 players already knew whether they would be in the knockout. Mulliner and Johnson (both on 3 wins) were to play in the final round for the other place. The first game was close, although Johnson played some unusual shots towards the end, and didn't seem to turn up for game 2, and Mulliner won 7-5, 7-1. Good was on 6 wins, with much better net games, so knew no-one could beat him to first place even if he lost. He beat I Burridge anyway, albeit only taking the first game 7-6 and losing game 2. In the only match left that could affect the knockout, Bilton put up a good fight but Wade won in 2 to finish third and leave Mulliner fourth. The match between Smith and E Burridge went to hoop 13 in game 3, with Burridge coming out on top, which meant that Smith had managed to lose all of his matches 2-1.

The semi-final between Good and Mulliner was a close battle. In game 1, Mulliner was 4-6 down but in the jaws of 11 and looking to take the game to 13. Good played a jump shot from 5 yards and 30 degrees which hit the upright, brought Mulliner's ball out, and spun in-off to take the game. Game 2 was closer still. Good reached 6 first, but Mulliner had a great chance at hoop 12 for a flick to 13. He chose to maximise distance on Good's ball while keeping himself nearby. However, the angle Good was now shooting

from meant he didn't have to clear, and from the North boundary, he ran the hoop clean.

Although he hadn't played his best throughout the tournament, Wade upped his game on the last morning, and he took that form and confidence into his semi-final against E Burridge. Both were playing well, but a few shots didn't go well for Burridge, and it started to get to him. When hoop shots seem to make the middle of a hoop and the ball is still rejected, it shows how difficult Quadways are. Wade maintained focus and some more misses from his opponent allowed him to join Good in the Final.

With the top two seeds in the Final, it promised to be a good quality match for the crowd to enjoy. Perhaps it being a final meant both players took some time to settle, as there were 7 missed hoop attempts at hoop 4 alone. Although, once that point was scored, both players settled into the match. It was close all the way, but a crucial hoop was the eleventh. Good decided that Wade's first approach didn't need moving, but a good shot got it into the jaws, leaving Good the only option to clear and hopefully get a chance at the jump. Wade missed the clearance and Good beautifully executed the lengthy, angled jump shot to steal hoop 11 and take the lead for the first time in the game. He then missed a sitter at 12 and allowed Wade to level up. Good approached 13 quite deep and Wade played in 2 blockers. Both players had a good look at whether the hoop was open, and after a couple of minutes deciding, Good ran it clean to take the first game.

The second game was equally competitive. Good took the lead, but Wade turned 3-5 into 5-5. Good put an excellent ball in front of 11. With his other ball on the North boundary having run 10 – and a possible block on the cards – Wade shot from the East boundary and nailed Good's ball in the middle. After a clearing battle, Wade played in to put the pressure on Good's hoop shot, but it didn't work and Good ran 11, leaving Wade's balls unable to take good position at 12, as they were blocked by 11 and hampered by 2. He got as close as he could, but Good cleared it once his other ball was in position. Wade responded with a return clearance, centre-ball from 12 yards away on the South boundary. However, when he got the chance, Good didn't make the same mistake twice, and this time ran 12 for the game, and also the title.

Jack Good is the first person to win this format of the GC First Eight without losing a match. He is still improving and his performance in this event earned him the number 1 spot in the UK rankings.

Johnson and I Burridge contested the Bowl, which was another close match. There were a few unforced errors from Johnson and Burridge found form to take the match 7-6, 7-5.

GC Second Eight: The Kate Jones Memorial

by Richard Bilton

Competing in the Second Eight (Kate Jones Memorial) were: Lionel Tibble (Northampton), Chris Roberts (Phyllis Court), Tim Russell (Roehampton), Dominic Aarvold (Bristol), Steve Leonard (East Dorset), Sam Cuthbert (Cheltenham), John Taylor (Watford) and Diana Wilson (Roehampton).

Aarvold and Roberts started well with 2-0 wins over Tibble and Leonard. Taylor lost the first game to Russell, but managed to scrape the second 7-6 and then win the match. Cuthbert came through against Wilson at hoop 13 in game 3. Cuthbert and Tibble then reversed their first round outcomes, as the latter won in 3 games. Roberts continued his unbeaten run with another 2-0 win, this time over Russell. Aarvold lost his first game against Wilson, but rediscovered his form to win the match and complete the only 7-0 win in the event. Taylor came through a comfortable match 2-0 against Leonard. Cuthbert made light work in beating Roberts 2-0, as did Aarvold with Taylor. Wilson also beat Leonard 2-0, although the second game was 7-6. The third seeds have a tough first day, as they have to play both the top two seeds in succession, and having lost 2-0 to Roberts, Russell then did the same against Tibble, which meant he hadn't won any of his matches on the first day. Leonard was in the same boat, and Wilson only had 1 win. Tibble, Roberts, Cuthbert and Taylor all had 2 wins, while Aarvold was undefeated.

At the start of day 2, all matches went to 3 games, and Leonard looked like he was going to achieve his first win, but lost out at hoop 13 in game 3 against Tibble. Aarvold had a similarly close encounter with Roberts to continue his unbeaten run. Russell had a very competitive match against Wilson to gain his first win, with the first two games 7-6 and winning 7-5 in the third. Cuthbert lost the middle game to Taylor, and also won the third 7-5. The top 2 seeds play in round 5, and Roberts lost the first game, but fought back to take the match. Aarvold won the first game against Russell 7-2, and the momentum definitely shifted as he then lost 7-1, 7-4 to lose his first match. Wilson won the first game

against Taylor 7-6, but had a more comfortable win in game 2. Cuthbert also won in two against Leonard. If Taylor had beaten Tibble, they would both have been on 3 wins at the end of day 2, but he unfortunately lost out at hoop 13 in game 3. Having just beaten the top seed, Roberts was feeling confident he would replicate that success against the bottom seed, but Wilson had other ideas and cleared everything in the middle to win 2-0. Aarvold not only lost another match, but it was a very convincing 7-2, 7-3 win for Cuthbert. Russell also had a straightforward 2-0 win over Leonard to get him to 3 wins alongside Roberts and Wilson. At the end of the second day, Cuthbert on was ahead with 5 wins but not guaranteed to stay there, and Tibble and Aarvold were also through with 4 wins.

Going into the final day, there was a possibility there could be 4 people on 3 wins, in which case, Wilson would have prevailed with better net games, even if she lost the last round. With both of them knowing whether they were in the knockout, Aarvold saw off Leonard 2-0. The other three matches went to 3 games. Cuthbert overcame Russell to take top spot with 6 wins. Wilson did end up losing to Tibble at hoop 13 in the last game, and remained on 3 wins, which meant everything rested on the last match in play. The first two games were close, but Roberts beat Taylor 7-2 in the third to take the final place in the knockout.

In the first semi-final, game 1 was close with Tibble's clearances just hitting that bit more centrally. Aarvold found inspiration and was hitting more in game 2, but it completely deserted him in game 3. Roberts was ahead in game 1 against Cuthbert, but didn't take advantage and lost at hoop 13. Cuthbert then found top gear and won the second game 7-1. He continued this form into the Final against Tibble, and hardly missed a shot. He won 2-0, winning both games with a jump shot at hoop 10.

Aarvold beat Roberts 10-6 for third place. Wilson lost the first game against Taylor, but narrowly won the next two 7-6 to win the Bowl.

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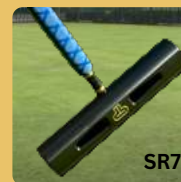
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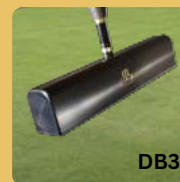
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GC Third Eight: The Suzanne Roberts Memorial

by Louise Smith

The GC Third Eight (Suzanne Roberts Memorial) was held at Nailsea Croquet Club where, as usual, we were guaranteed a warm welcome.

The eight players competing were: David Goacher (Bristol), Tim Jolliff (Budleigh), Neil Fillery (Taunton Deane), Louise Smith (Budleigh), Tim King (Ashby), Colin Britt (Camerton & Peasedown), Stephen Custance-Baker (Taunton Deane), and Paul Gunn (Wingrave).

Smith started strongly, beating top seed Goacher 2-0 in the first round and followed this up with a win over Gunn to secure 2 early match victories. Goacher's performance failed to secure wins in any of the first day matches, losing also to Britt 1-2 and Fillery 1-2. Jolliff also managed 2 match wins, beating King 2-1 and Britt 2-0, having lost in round 2 to Fillery 0-2. All of King's block matches went to three games, with a win over Gunn. It was Custance-Baker that took the early lead, with three match wins on day 1, despite an incredibly close encounter with Smith, 7-6, 3-7, 7-6, where she unfortunately peeled his ball through hoop 13 in the deciding game.

Day 2 brought no further joy for Gunn, despite some good

play, as he failed to secure a match win. Smith could not stave off a 2-0 defeat at the hands of Jolliff, but went on to win her next two matches against Fillery 2-0 and Britt 2-1. Jolliff won all three matches on Day 2, and King rallied, scoring wins against Goacher 2-1 and Fillery 2-1. Custance-Baker kept up his great performance, adding two further wins and losing only to Goacher at the close of the day's play.

At the start of Day 3, Jolliff and Custance-Baker were certain to qualify as they played round 7 against each other. Jolliff looked by far the stronger player, taking game 1 7-2, but Custance-Baker suddenly stepped up a gear and won both remaining games 7-6, 7-5. This placed Custance-Baker first and Jolliff second after all the block results were in.

Smith needed to beat King to challenge Jolliff for second place but, as he had done all weekend, King took the match to three games and came back from a 3-7 loss in game 2 to take the match 7-4 in the third. Had Britt taken down Fillery, King would have been denied a place in the knockout, but Britt instead lost to Fillery 0-2, relegating himself to the Bowl.

The Bowl saw no further joy for Gunn as Fillery moved on to the final, where he was joined by Britt after a 3-game tussle with Goacher. The Bowl Final, a repeat of round 7 for Fillery and Britt, also stretched to three games. This time, it was Britt who was the worthy winner, having just missed out on qualification to the main knockout earlier in the day.

The main semi-finals therefore featured Stephen Custance-Baker against Tim King and Tim Jolliff against Louise Smith. Both semi-finals were strongly competitive, but Custance-Baker failed to find the extra gear he'd displayed over the previous two days, narrowly losing to King 5-7, 6-7. Smith ran ahead but was reeled in by Jolliff, who took both games 7-5, with a rather fortunate long-distance clearance going in-off at hoop 10, helping him to a 6-4 lead in game 2, from which Smith did not recover.

The Final, with the two Tim's competing, went hoop for hoop in the early stages until Jolliff managed to take the lead. King played well, but was unable to catch up, losing 5-7 in game 1. Jolliff went forward with the confidence of being a game ahead, and in game 2, King felt that added pressure with a couple of missed clearance shots proving decisive. Jolliff capitalised and secured victory at hoop 11, winning the GC Third Eight for the first time. He was presented with the Suzanne Roberts Memorial trophy by his fellow finalist, Tim King, as representative of Croquet England.

I would like to say thank you to all the club members and volunteers at Nailsea for the effort made to ensure the tournament was a great success, and give special thanks to James Galpin for expertly checking and re-setting the hoops each day.

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CROQUET AND THE OLYMPICS

by Ian Bond

Croquet has only featured once at the Olympics: in Paris, at the 1900 Games. It did so in the shape of the old game first commercialised in England by Spratt and Jaques in the late 1850s, not as the later English game first formally codified in the Conference Laws of 1870-73. This older game was 'tight' croquet, in which the player's foot was placed firmly on their ball for the croquet stroke, and with a ten hoop/two peg setting. Strokes were played golf-style (or side style, as it was then known, to distinguish it from forward style), with the player facing across rather than along the line of play – a practical necessity, for tight croquet. The hoops were wide bent-wire arches and the court appears from photographs to have been of compacted earth rather than grass.

All the contestants in Paris were French. It was at one time thought that one of them – Marcel Haentjens – was Belgian (his sister and two cousins also played in the events). He too is now known to have been French, so it was not in fact an international competition as would now be required. If that casts doubt on its Olympic credentials, at least it was one of the five sports in which women were first allowed to compete at the Olympics. The one ball singles was won by Gaston Aumoitte (who also, with singles runner up Georges

John, won the doubles), and the two ball singles by Chretien Waydelich, who took third place in the one ball singles.

Croquet was not included in the 1904 Olympics, which were held in St Louis, Missouri (which had replaced Chicago as the host city). Instead, its place was taken by a now largely forgotten American croquet variant called Roque, developed there in the 1890s and overseen by the National Roque Association, so named from 1899 (it had been established as the National Croquet Association in 1882). The Roque court was only 20 yards by 10, with the corners cut off by diagonals six feet long, and of compacted earth or sand rather than grass. The boundaries were of heavy timber, faced with rubber, or of concrete. So the hard rubber balls – slightly smaller than ours – rebounded into the court. The ten hoops were firmly anchored and arranged somewhat like the Eglinton Castle setting of the 1860s. Apart from that, the rules were much the same as in the English sequence game of the time – and without the carry-over deadness which is characteristic of the modern American six wicket game. Sources differ as to the inventor of the game's distinctive name: it is attributed either to Samuel Crosby or J W Babcock, both of New York City, in 1899.

There were only a handful of entries in the St Louis event, all Americans (few foreigners participated in these

Olympics in any case). The poor turnout was blamed on the long journeys involved for potential competitors and a scheduling conflict with the annual National Tournament. Gold went to Charles Jacobus of Springfield, Mass; Silver to S O Streeter of Thawville, Ill; and Bronze to D C Brown of Onarga, Ill. Jacobus was also on the Olympic Roque Committee and was Official Editor of NRA publications at the time. Letters from him, explaining and advocating Roque, appear in several issues of the Gazette before the Great War. There is some further correspondence from Nina Coote (about Roque in California) in the late 1930s.

For students of croquet and its variants, it is worth adding that the Americans had not only developed their own croquet variant but also played Golf Croquet. This too was different from our game, and was perhaps more deserving of the name. It was, so we are told in Spalding's Athletic Library, 'designed to utilise the favorite strokes of drives in Golf, but on a moderate sized lawn ... the course is marked, first, by wickets or arches, similar to those used in Croquet, and second, by numbered flags. No account need be taken of the actual distances between these wickets, it being better to have them unsymmetrical or varying. A spot or tree must be chosen near the centre of the lawn and, in placing the wickets they must face this centre, as all shots made through wickets are towards the centre ... the mallets designed for the game are different from the croquet mallets, having longer handles and a bevel so arranged on one end of the mallet that it will lift the ball clear of the turf ...'.

Were Croquet ever to return to the Olympics, it would in all likelihood be in none of these earlier forms. Though we could perhaps expect a more genuinely international contest, it seems to be a remote prospect and there would doubtless be long debates about what version should be played. It would perhaps rival Golf as the slowest and least athletic of Olympic sports.



Comment on colle avec désinvolture son adversaire dans une mauvaise situation.

ALL SEASONS CROQUET CLUB

by Paul Hetherington

Welcome to Croquet England’s newest croquet club the All Seasons Croquet Club.

All Seasons has a split site, a summer base in South Ockenden in Essex, and a winter home in the heart of Soham where they run indoor croquet one weekend every month. The Club is looking for members at just £50 annual membership fee, offering a big reduction on the cost of joining in the winter programme of short lawn handicap speed doubles Association Croquet.

Alternatively why not book in for a session of indoor croquet this winter:

NOVEMBER

Saturday November 9th 2024 Soham Trophy, speed doubles

Sunday November 10th 2024 Rose Bowl, speed doubles

DECEMBER

Saturday 14th December 2024 Albert Lawrence Trophy, speed doubles

Sunday 15th December 2024 The Soham Trophy, speed doubles

JANUARY

Saturday 11th January 2025 Belgian Cup, speed doubles

Sunday 12th January 2025 The Martins Trophy, high/low speed doubles

FEBRUARY

Saturday 8th February 2025 The Cornelius Cup, speed doubles

Sunday 9th February 2025 The Millennium Cup, speed doubles

MARCH

Saturday 8th March 2025 Inter Counties, level advanced speed doubles with peels

Sunday 9th March 2025 MLP Mallets speed doubles

To find out more contact the secretary paulhether65@outlook.com



NEWS FROM THE EAST MIDLANDS

By Patricia Duke-Cox

FEDERATION SHORT CROQUET COMPETITION

Venue: Woodhall Spa Croquet Club | Date: Thursday 29 August 2024

Three clubs within the East Midlands Federation were able to field 2 competitors each to compete for the Federation Short Croquet Salver.

The handicaps ranged from 3 through to 9 in this full-bisque event, but unlike the previous week when the Jim Kirby Cup was competed, there was no “run-away” winner. Of the six players, four managed 3 wins each, but everyone had a least one win. To determine which club was the winner, the number of wins from each competitor was combined that saw Nottingham Croquet Club the winners with 6 games won. Other clubs competing were Pinchbeck and Woodhall Spa.



JIM KIRBY CUP 2024

Woodhall Spa Croquet Club hosted the Jim Kirby Cup in August 2024 and generously provided refreshments throughout the day.

The format was Short Croquet, the same as the last couple of years, which encourages participation from newer club members to consider playing Association Croquet as an alternative to Golf Croquet. All players had bisques to use and the range this year was from 3 to 9.

The Cup holder from Boston was unable to compete this year but Nottingham, Pinchbeck and Woodhall Spa had two members each. Playing five timed games brought about an easy result for the manager, Patricia Duke-Cox with the winner being a local member who was entering an AC competition for the first time having been given a handicap of 6 to begin based on his GC prowess and local knowledge.

Results were: Andrew Grant 4 wins; David Boxell 3 wins; David Park 3 wins; Bob Aspinall 2 wins; Ken Knock 2 wins; Carol Scott 1 win.



NEWS FROM SWANAGE CC

SWANAGE CROQUET CLUB IS ENJOYING A BUMPER 2024 SEASON

by Nick O'Connor

This year the club has gone from strength to strength. The club has welcomed new members who have picked up the skills and rules of the game very well and are enjoying playing croquet at the club regularly on a social basis. The club is now almost at full capacity. Lawn preparation and maintenance have been carried out superbly by a group of club members who have worked tirelessly to convert the playing field (formerly a football pitch) in the grounds of Swanage Primary School into what are now two competition standard courts. Last season, when work on the lawns was at an early stage, all the club league competition matches had to be played on away grounds. This year the playing surface has been greatly improved and home league matches have resumed. Swanage plays in the South West Federation League and has two competitive teams. Results have been fantastic!

The High Handicap Second Team has won all of its first three matches, beating Winterborne Valley at home 13-7, local rivals East Dorset (Poole) 12-8 at home and Winterborne away 11-9. Most recently was a narrow loss to East Dorset 8-12, but the league had already been won! The semi-final SW region match is against the winners of the match between St Agnes, Cornwall and Dowlish Wake, Somerset.

What a great season so far and excellent for this team to reach the semi-final stage for 2 years running. Last season they made it to the final, only to be beaten by Llandaff, Cardiff, and so we were 2023 runners up.

The All Handicap First Team have also had a fantastic season so far and have made it to the semi-final of their league where they will play Bude, Cornwall at home on September 12th and were also the 2022 champions. The team made the semi-final with

two matches to spare having beaten Budleigh Salterton, Devon at home 19-1 and 11-9 away, Exeter away 11-9 and 14-2 at home and Taunton Deane at home 16-4. In their most recent match away against a very good Taunton team the match was lost by the narrowest of margins 9.5-10.5, but again the league had already been won!

Good luck to both teams in their semi-final matches, flying the flag for Swanage.

Within the club social play happens throughout the week, as do internal club competitions, which give all players the chance to play competitive croquet if they want to. Social events also happen throughout the season.

In August each year the club holds the highly successful and popular internal Bob Oliver Competition Day. There are four separate competitions during the day that are designed to combine the

best of social and competitive play. For the club it is a great way to bring everyone together and, most importantly, it is a really good opportunity to introduce club members who have not played competitive croquet before to the exciting dimensions of tactical play, improved accuracy and winning hoops to secure match wins. We love the day and are very confident that this event has been a key player in the development of our very successful league teams. If anyone wants to know more about our Bob Oliver Competition Day then please contact us via our website, <https://www.swanagecroquetclub.com/>



The All Handicap team have just convincingly won their regional semi-final match against Bude and will now go on to play in the South West final! Congratulations to both teams for a great day of croquet.

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 9

CROQUET AND RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY

by David Graham

There are many examples of croquet depicted in religious iconography, so it is not surprising that playing croquet is associated with vicarage lawns. However, the game's significance is often overlooked due to the controversy surrounding many of the translations of the gospels, often made several hundred years after they were written.

The earliest reference to croquet in the gospels relates to the occupation of Joseph of Nazareth, described as a carpenter, in particular a reference to his having a side-line making mallets. It was assumed that this referred to the wooden mallets used in carpentry, but a 10th century translation by Aldred in the Lindisfarne Gospels suggests that the actual side-line was making croquet mallets for the Roman nobility, who were avid croquet players. Aldred is known to have been a keen croquet player himself, which some scholars suggest may have influenced his interpretation. In fact, croquet was only played in monastic orders as a form of religious instruction prior to its wider introduction following the Norman Conquest, an idea which is supported by depictions of croquet playing saints in medieval illuminated manuscripts (Fig. 1). The croquet connection is reinforced by the number of religious relics in the medieval period that purported to be a sliver of wood from the mallets used by the saints.

The most famous depiction of a saint playing croquet is of Saint Francis of Assisi by Giotto di Bondone c. 1300, one of a series of frescoes in the Upper Church of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi (Fig. 2). Saint Francis was a keen croquet player and used to feed the birds in order to stop them pecking at the hoop holes in the monastery lawn. However, Francis gave up croquet and retired to a hermitage once new rules were introduced giving novice monks with higher handicaps a hoop advantage, rather than extra turns.

A painting by the Spanish Baroque artist Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682), entitled The Holy Family (c.1670), clearly shows Joseph making a croquet mallet, with several more stacked in the background (Fig. 3), suggesting the interpretation relating to croquet mallets was well established in the 17th century. However, Murillo is known to have been a croquet player and his painting may simply have been an allegory.

We know that croquet was exported by the Romans to their provinces, which included Judea and matches between rival clubs were hotly contested. The home match between Galilee and Bethlehem has been suggested as the location of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, at which an unusually large crowd of supporters had gathered, all expecting to be catered for by the home club. The scene is depicted in one of the panels in an obscure 17th century choir screen from the Netherlands, which has seven figures, including four holding mallets, but it is not known whether they represent the home or away team (Fig.5). The panel notably depicts six loaves and one fish, which is significant because it represents the six hoops and a peg in the game of croquet. The modern game is unlikely to attract an audience of five thousand spectators, which is just as well, given that it would be a challenge for most modern croquet clubs to provide the catering.

Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea, was himself a keen croquet player (Fig. 4) and is recorded as having played in an international croquet match between the Roman Republic and Judea, which Rome won and went on to become champions. However, no evidence exists to link the events for which he is most famous with croquet, despite some more recent conspiracy theories to the contrary.



Fig 5. C17th Choir Screen



Fig. 1: Illuminated Gospel c. 1400



Fig. 2: Saint Francis - Giotto c.1300



Fig. 3: The Holy Family - Murillo 1670



Fig. 4: Pontius Pilate c. 36AD

MCWEENEY RETAINED

by Paul Hetherington

In July Croquet England's team set out to defend the McWeeney trophy against Croquet Ireland at the Carrickmines Club in Dublin. The team, sponsored by Ambassador Cruises, had to cope with a nightmare journey as computer issues caused hours of delay to flights out on the Friday, but the team were all present by Saturday morning when play began.

England team : Nigel Matthews (-1) Brian Medley (0), Adrian Kirby (0), Paul Hetherington (2) Captain, Deborah Marcus (8) and Alex Lake (11).

On paper the Irish team were the stronger as, though the top four handicaps were evenly matched places, 5 and 6 gave Ireland a distinct handicap advantage for the games to be played level advanced.

Irish team : Sandy Greig (-1), Nathaniel Healy (0), Brian Havill (0), Daniel Bennett (2.5), Dave McGrath (4) and Duncan Styles (5).

As always the match began with a round of doubles which England won three to nil. Saturday concluded with two rounds of singles which were both shared at three all, leaving

England needing to win four games on the Sunday to win the trophy. The morning doubles saw England win two to one with all riding on the final round of singles where each player was against their opposite number. Brian Medley completed a first tournament triple peel in winning the second-tier singles, while Sandy Greig completed a clinical triple to level the match defeating Nigel Matthews, who had earlier made a maiden competitive triple in a doubles win. Adrian Kirby defeated Brian Havill to win the trophy, and Paul Hetherington also won to draw the round of singles at three all for a match result of 14-10 to England. The Maugham Quaife (for the best performance) was awarded to Sandy Greig unbeaten in singles and the winner by a remarkable post-time comeback in an earlier match.

England player results: Paul Hetherington won three singles and one doubles, Brian Medley won two singles and two doubles, Adrian Kirby won two singles and one doubles, Nigel Matthews won one singles and two doubles, Alex Lake won one singles and two doubles, Deborah Marcus won two doubles.



RUNNING AN ANGLED HOOP

Running an angled hoop needs care. The ball must just clear the near wire and glance off the far wire into the gap before continuing through. The line down the centre of the mallet head will point more and more towards the far wire as the angle of the hoop run increases. Coaches need to guide their students to stalk carefully, and cast the mallet over the ball far enough to reach up to hoop level, so as to check the exact line of strike. Mental readiness is also important: alert, calm, physically relaxed.

Cliff Jones recommends this additional tip. Move the mallet very slightly to one side so that the edge of the mallet sits exactly over one edge of the ball. Students can think of the mallet edge as a ruler, showing the line of travel. This makes it easy to check how accurate the aim is. Then move the mallet an inch or so to the other side to complete the check, before returning the mallet back to the centre line of the ball.

For me, the most reliable way of doing this is not to move the arms – keep them in playing position – but through a small, brief adjustment of stance. Keep both feet still, then shift the weight of the body very slightly over onto the leg furthest from the hoop. If approaching the hoop from the left, the body is now supported more on the left leg than the right. Align the left edge of the mallet head with the left edge of the ball. Check the line to ensure the ball will just clear the near wire.

Then shift the weight of the body very slightly over onto the other leg, align the right hand edges of mallet and ball, and check whether it's possible for the ball to glance off the far wire and through the hoop. Finally let the body return easily and naturally to a neutral, balanced stance, and ensure the mallet is once again central over the ball before taking the shot.

It's important then not to snatch at the shot, but to stroke it through calmly and purposefully, eye on the back of the ball, and with the mallet following through smoothly.

For players with hoop phobia, another tip once the line of strike is established is to mentally extend the line, on through the hoop to a blade of grass beyond it. Play the ball towards that shot, ignoring the hoop.

Where the angle is steep and the distance short, double-tapping can happen, so encourage your students to have the shot watched.

A length of string with two tent pegs – a versatile resource for a croquet coach – can also help students understand. Use it to show a narrow 'fan of success' to help students visualise the extreme edge of the hoop-running line. If the direction of travel is just inside the string, and parallel to it, the ball should go through.

And of course giving the ball some spin will help it through the hoop, either by lifting the toe of the mallet slightly, or by striking downwards on it.



Janet Chapman
plays an angled
hoop shot
Photo: John Harris

Coaching Pages

BY JOHN HARRIS

BECOME A COACH!

Have you considered becoming a coach? You don't need to be a top player to be a successful coach – far from it. Much more important are a warm and welcoming personality, good inter-personal skills, and a genuine interest in supporting and helping others.

All the Academies will be running Coach Training courses early in the new season, so now is the time to decide to go for it. Some Federations may also organise courses. Outlines of the new Academy programmes will be in the next Gazette, with further details on the Academies' own websites. Places usually fill quickly so make sure you apply in good time.

The aim of the Coach Training Course is not only to ensure you have a secure working knowledge of areas such as key Laws/Rules and safeguarding, but also to see a range of coaching tips and techniques in action. The course is also planned to develop your understanding of session planning, group management skills, using simple visual aids to transform coaching, and other aspects of what it takes to be a successful coach.

Official recognition as a coach means that your planned coaching activities are covered by Croquet England insurance. But becoming a coach brings wider benefits. Coaching others, and accessing coaching materials, both help directly to develop and improve your own game. It is also a very rewarding experience for the coach.

NEWLY QUALIFIED COACHES

The following 19 players have passed all stages of the accreditation process at the appropriate level and have been added to the Croquet England List of Coaches. Congratulations to them all.

NEW CLUB-LEVEL COACHES

Nigel Akers, Nottingham CC
Peter Allan, Harwell CC
Makis Aperghis, Cheltenham CC
Colin Brim, Woking CC
Julie Broome, Southwell CC
Cathie Dance, York CC
Alan Dodds, Compton CC
Ian Draper, Nottingham CC
Fiona Fall, Compton CC
Sandra Guildford, Woking CC
Tom Hartwell, Ealing CC
Mike Hempstock, Gainsborough CC
Andrew Lockwood, Guildford CC
Michael Rice, East Dorset CC
Richard Sanville, Ashby CC
Tony Strickett, St Agnes CC

NEW GRADE 1 GC COACHES

Brian Aikens, Rottingdean CC
Tony Elkin, Chichester CC

NEW GRADE 2 AC COACH

Lionel Stock, York CC

Club-Level Coaches are accredited to coach beginners and high handicap players at their own clubs. Graded Coaches are authorised to coach at more advanced levels at other clubs and at Academies. To find out how to become a coach enter "Become a Coach" into the Croquet England website.

"I have enjoyed the coaching role immensely. Being able to share my enthusiasm and knowledge with the beginners has benefitted both myself and them, and I get great pleasure from seeing their smiles at their success."

Kate Packham (Nottingham CC)

PRACTICE ROUTINE: HOOP RUNNING

This routine is one of a set by Ian Burrridge (Nottingham CC), with refinements by Ian and by Rachel Gee. Thanks to Judith Rowe, Ashby CC, for passing it on.

This practice routine can be played solo or competitively.

Start with a firmly set hoop and a set of bisques or cones set as yard markers at each yard marking from 1-7.

Solo: Start with a ball at 1 yard. Run the hoop. When this has been successfully done, move the ball back a yard and run from there. Continue and see how far back you get. Go back to one yard and start again whenever you fail.

Competitively: Each person needs to run the hoop successfully at each distance to progress to a harder distance. If you both fail at a given distance you both try again. The first person to successfully run a distance that the other person has failed scores 1 point and you reset back to starting at 1 yard hoops again. First to 7, with 2 clear points, wins.

Solo modification: Start with 4 balls at a given distance. Based on how many of the 4 successfully run the hoop you vary how far forward or back you move in relation to the hoop. If you achieve:

- 0/4 move 2 yards nearer to the hoop
- 1/4 move 1 yard nearer to the hoop
- 2/4 stay at the current distance from the hoop
- 3/4 move 1 yard further from the hoop
- 4/4 move 2 yards further from the hoop

This exercise is great for helping you to accurately assess how likely you are to run hoops from different distances. Make a note of the distance where you run 50% of hoops and see if you can improve this.

Solo and competitive modification: If you aren't regularly getting up to the longer distance hoop runs you can flip this game into reverse so you start from 7 yards and then move closer if you both fail. Again the first person to run at a distance the opponent fails gets a point.

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SHORT CROQUET FOCUS



Some of the 2024 Viking Challenge competitors
Photo: John Harris

BOWDON BOLDLY GOES

Another club flying the flag for Short Croquet is Bowdon, Greater Manchester, where it is enjoying a surge of interest. Several of the club's stronger players have been attracted by the challenge of mandatory peeling while competing with a full range of other handicaps in the local Federation SC league.

Bowdon ran its first midweek Short Tournament in 2023 and its sixteen places were rapidly filled. Extra lawns were allocated for 2024, allowing the event to expand to 22 entries from six different clubs over the two days.

Tournament manager Brian Medley said, "It was a pleasure to welcome so many players, and to incorporate the North West Federation's Millennium Short Croquet event alongside our own tournament, each with its own trophy at stake. The Bowdon Trophy winner Roger Brooks proved almost unbeatable in this event, rewarding spectators with virtuoso displays of peeling. Everyone was able to play as many games as they wanted and there was delight at the quality of the lawns."

Several players, including Roger, managed to complete a healthy eleven games over the two days.

In the Millennium event, Bowdon's own Cas Sinclair went right through to the final, dispatching Roger in the first round. An interesting point of law arose in her semi-final, and play had to be suspended for twenty minutes while all the available referees congregated to discuss the status of mandatory peels during the extension period of a timed ending. Despite the delay, Cas won the game and also won the final 14-0 against club president Brian Storey to clinch the trophy.

VIKINGS AT LARGE

The York Viking Challenge in early September proved to be another relaxed, enjoyable weekend. Now in its ninth year, it attracted 18 players from 9 different clubs across four Federations, with a good balance of female and male entries.

Games were played to a 70% bisque allocation. This figure, arrived at after extensive statistical analysis by Alan Locket of Beverley CC and tested over several seasons in internal club competitions, has proved a good way of avoiding the 14:6 scoreline and making for competitive games with good exchange of innings.

Several players remained in contention for the cup right through to the last round. Home contestant Sue Longcroft lifted the trophy, with Louise McElarney (Penrith) and newcomer Philip Watson sharing the runner-up position, and Paul Arbos (Nailsea) just behind.

NEW MERIT AWARDS

Congratulations to the following:

ASSOCIATION CROQUET – BRONZE MERIT AWARD

Andrew Gould - Pendle Midweek

ASSOCIATION CROQUET – SILVER MERIT AWARD

Steve Chapman - Sussex County
Annual Championship

ASSOCIATION CROQUET – GOLD MERIT AWARD

Brian Medley - McWeeney Trophy

ASSOCIATION CROQUET – PLATINUM MERIT AWARD

Gabrielle Higgins - European
Championship

GOLF CROQUET – BRONZE MERIT AWARD

Liza Furnival - Cheltenham C Level
Lucy Closs - Compton C Level
Jill Bateman - Bath C Level
Jane Bell - Sidmouth C Level
Iain Richardson - Guildford &
Godalming C Level

GOLF CROQUET – SILVER MERIT AWARD

Colin Spencer - Hunstanton B Level
Stephen Harbron - Bath B Level
Tony James - Compton B Level
Andrew Lockwood - Guildford &
Godalming B Level

GOLF CROQUET – GOLD MERIT AWARD

Colin Spencer - Hunstanton A Level

To see how to earn an Award pop Croquet England Merit Award Scheme into Google. It takes you straight to the page. If you qualify for an Award, do claim it! Any Croquet England event you play in will have a Manager who can make the claim for you; otherwise, download the form from the CqE website. The form covers both AC and GC Merit Awards so claiming your Award should be straightforward.

RABBITS IN SPOTLIGHTS

by Stephanie Ferguson

Ben Rhydding Croquet Club in Yorkshire launched a new contest for beginners at their annual tournament in August.

The Rabbits Cup is aimed at new players, particularly recent graduates from the spring training courses the club runs for members of Ilkley and District u3a.

Headed by coach and club captain Penny Clark, BRCC offers four three-hour sessions over four weeks focusing on the basics of golf croquet as a community outreach initiative.

The courses are hugely popular and graduates usually decide to carry on playing and join the club.

The Rabbits, named after the golf term for beginners, attracted seven players and was won by Simon Fielding, who had never lifted a mallet in his life until he went on the course this year.

He beat fellow u3a member Iain Thake from last year's course by 7 hoops to 3 in a well-fought game. For his hoop-hopping he was presented with a bone china Rabbit mug by club chair Alan Ebbutt.

"I wanted to try something different," said Simon, a leading runner in the past. "I have always had a competitive spirit so I thought I would try croquet. We played a good game and I was better than I have been for a while and managed to focus."

Two other graduates from the training courses were also successful in the mainstream competitions. Brian Firth, at 93 the oldest player, got through to the doubles semi-finals while Blake Hemingway won the handicap singles to take

the Trevor Grange Trophy, beating Marion Cofield by 7 hoops to 5.

Penny Clark was kept busy winning the doubles with Marion for the Cynthia Barraclough Trophy, beating David Carpenter and Chris Forkins 7-5; but she was beaten 7-4 in the singles by club treasurer John Green, who reprised his 2022 win to take the Richard Lorimer Shield.

Penny was impressed by her trainees. "The Rabbits beginners were of a very high standard and we had a great day of finals" she said.

Following the success of the link-up with the u3a, the committee is now considering ways to reach out to younger members to offer training to juniors.



Newcomers from left Viv Halliwell, Pat Walker, Anne Wilson, Sue Hope, Paul Johnson, Simon Fielding and Iain Thake.



Handicap singles winner Blake Hemingway
Hoop hopper: Winner Simon Fielding with his Rabbits mug
Doubles triumph: Penny Clark and Marion Cofield
Singles champ: John Green with his trophy

CROQUET FOR HOME-EDUCATED CHILDREN AT WOKING CC

by Sara Anderson

There are some exciting things happening at Woking with Junior Croquet. Here's the back story.

I am Sara Anderson, Croquet Club Secretary and a coach at Woking. I have a home educated grandson, Mark aged 11. He has started to play croquet and really enjoys it. He has been chatting to his friends, and many have expressed an interest in the game. That provided a germ of an idea.

On the 8th July I formed a private Facebook group for Home Educated Children's Croquet with Cheryl (my daughter and Mark's mum). Home Educated Children have much more flexibility than those in state or private education. They can play at times when others are at school, thus they are able to play in tournaments and activities during the week. Within two hours we had about 18 juniors, mostly aged 11-14, wanting to come to our taster sessions on the afternoons of Monday 29th July and Thursday 22nd August. There were many other messages from parents saying their children want to try the game but couldn't make those dates. They asked to be put on a list for when we start coaching sessions in earnest.

We have had our first taster session and had an amazing afternoon. We provided five coaches (Colin Groves, Ian and Sara Anderson, Colin Brim and Sandra Guildford), enough to provide one-to-one coaching. We started off with some fun games and activities and ended up playing Golf Croquet. The feedback was good from both parents and juniors. The kids were incredible. They soaked up the instruction like sponges. Within minutes they were hitting in 6 metre shots and running our normal club hoops. We got the parents to join in too and that made the experience even better as they were just as enthusiastic and learned alongside their children. It's a BOGOF. From the response of all who came it looks almost certain that we will be starting a Junior Section with parents too...whoop whoop!!

In addition to the Home Education groups, I have also

approached the Head and Deputy Head of a local school and hope to be able to plan a programme with them for next year. During initial emails they asked if we would consider doing an after-school club. We have the equipment to enable us to do this at the school during the winter, using their playing field. Cross country croquet to start with maybe, but it would be another string to our bow.

Subsequently, I met with Ian Draper, the Croquet England Officer responsible for the development of U18's in the game. It was a brilliant meeting. He has written a course that is tailored towards the PE National Curriculum. It should mean that schools should be happy to integrate croquet coaching in their curriculum. It also means a lot of the preparation work has already been done. I came home with lots of equipment and the promise of support – wonderful.

Our hope, if this all comes together, is that the same idea will be repeated at other clubs, which could lead to interclub junior competitions and tournaments.



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WEBSITE

www.croquetengland.org.uk and www.croquet.org.uk are fabulous resources for croquet information covering membership, news, laws & rules, coaching, who's who, and tournament details with an online entry system.

The website also has a full glossary of croquet terms, jargon and acronyms that are sometimes used in Gazette reporting.

To find the glossary online, visit:

AC <https://www.croquet.org.uk/?p=games/tech/jargon>

GC <https://www.croquet.org.uk/?p=games/golf/gcJargon>

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Email contributions, including tournament reports should be sent direct to the Editor, or copied to the Editor if they are being posted to the Nottingham List.

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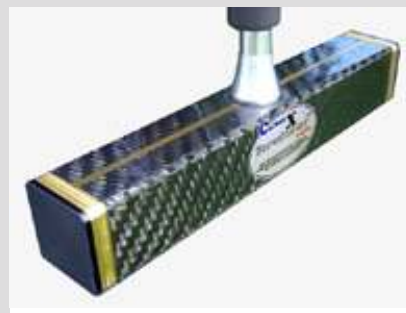
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