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THE CROQUET GAZETTE

ISSUE 304 AUGUST 2006





Dave Nick, aka 'The Quarryman', winner of the Cumbria Cup

Wiping the grin from even Cheshire's face
As Widow Rush ponders an evil notion.
And mid this tumult Quarry heard with pain
Ancestral voices prophesying rain.

A damsel with a dish of chips.
In a vision Leggy saw:
It was a hotel serving maid
And on his burning thirst she played
With red wine from the bar.
But Leggy's need was greater
He wanted so much more
That he beseeched that comely wench
To find the footie score.

The Hammer of the North was there
That sunny dome! Those eyes of ice!
Shaun of the Dead with baleful air
And all did cry, Beware! Beware!
As Waddle gave the Man a scare!

The Editor has paid the price,
The heinous cost of Paradise,
For - read my words with holy dread -
Around her hordes of children tread
And weave a circle round her thrice.
There is no wonder she may sob
To take a beating from Ruff Bob
To feel the lash of T. Ruant.

Last let me praise the Heavy Roller;
Then thank the peelers' favourite bowler,
Who builds a break as only Kubla can:
All power to the noble Quarryman.

**The Veteran's Championship
Sussex County 12-17 June 2006**

*Report by Richard Hoskyns
Bill Arliss and Dennis Moorcraft
Triumphed at the Veterans'
Championship*

The 2006 National Veterans' Championship was held in

mostly excellent weather at Southwick from 12-17 June. There was a much better entry than in 2005 and there was quite a fight for the championship itself with, at one time, the possibility of 4 players with the same number of wins. In the end two tied on 5 wins each, with a much back-to-form Bill Arliss of Southwick taking the Rothwell Challenge Cup from Alan Linton, now of Parkstone, on a who-beat-whom basis.

The Pidcock Trophy (over 70s' Championship) was won by Dennis Moorcraft of Cheltenham with 6 out of 7 wins, with Mrs Gene Mears of Southwick runner up with 5 out of 7 wins.

The Felixstowe Cup (advanced singles for those not in the two championships) was won by Donald Mears of Southwick with John Hobbs of Tunbridge Wells runner up.

The Strickland Cup (handicap singles those not in the above events) was won by John Timberlake of Surbiton.

The Meredith Cup (unrestricted handicap singles) was won by Tony Whateley of Glasgow who saw his handicap brought down from 18 to 12, with John Hobbs as the runner up.

In the X doubles, The Longman Trophies (The Sussex Trugs) were won by John Taylor and Mike Bottomley (Reigate Priory), with Richard & Pat Jackson (Southwick) as runners up.

In the Y doubles, the Gilbert Spoons, were won by Martin Granger Brown (Bowdon) and Tony Whateley (Glasgow) with Dennis Shaw (Ramsgate/Compton) and Robert Bateson (Guilford/Godalming).

All enjoyed the week with Sussex County Croquet Club being friendly hosts and providing excellent lunches and teas.

Terrey Sparkes won the Hunstanton Over-50 Tournament June 16-18 2006

Report by Ian Storey

Terrey Sparkes with the tournament trophy The beautiful weather seemed to inspire the full house of players at Hunstanton's Over-50 weekend. Everyone was full of the joys of summer and eager to play, making full use of the excellent lawns, which I believe are better than at any time in the previous sixteen years I have been a member.

Over-50 tournaments are relaxed but fiercely competitive and the result was still undecided when the final games began on Sunday afternoon with several players still in contention. To the delight of the large



Terrey Sparkes

gallery Margaret Anderton displayed tactics beyond her handicap by pegging out the manager's front ball and her own, leaving her backward ball for rover with his for hoop 4. They cheered loudly when she won.

It was a good weekend for the Andertons as husband Ken finished in second place, which earned a handicap reduction. But Terrey Sparkes emerged a clear winner with 7/8, having remarked on the Saturday evening "I've waited years to play like this!"

- 1st Terrey Sparkes 7/8
- 2nd Ken Anderton 6/7
- 3rd Margaret Anderton 5/6
- Handicap Changes
- Ken Anderton 4 to 3.5
- Margaret Anderton 14 to 12
- Paul Hill 4.5 to 5
- Terrey Sparkes 4 to 3.5

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Mark Hamilton and Daphne Gaitley winners of the Kirke-Green Bowls

Salmon, the Club President. The Horsburgh Cup dates back to the 1900's and is named after the Rev Horsburgh (probably a founder member) who won it in 1903, 1904 and 1905. Other winners include some very famous names in croquet: Miss D.D. Steel, Mrs Ionides, Lord Tollemache, Rev. G. F. H. Elvey, (later Vicar of Willingdon and a Compton Member), Dr Wiggins, Keith Wylie, Bryan Lloyd-Pratt and "Tiny" Tyrwhitt Drake.

As well as directing the Doubles Event, Tim Smith prepared an excellent ploughmans lunch each day. Frances Low directed the handicap events, and like Tim, also organised similar lunches for the next three days prepared by Carol Dixon.

The Saturday culminated in a much enjoyed fish and chip supper, some consolation for England sporting failures that day against Sri Lanka and Portugal.



Brian Stone, Anstey Cup Winner

Golf Croquet Open Championship Sussex County 22-25th June

Report by Bill Arliss

Reg Retains Singles, while Hopkins & Curry are too hot for Ware and King

Reg Bamford retained his singles title and gained revenge for his defeat by Stephen Mulliner in the 2006 GC World Championship with a straight-games win over Stephen in the final. Manager Bill Arliss had planned for the last three rounds of the knock-out to be played on Sunday with a planned start to the final around 2.30PM. However, five of the quarters and semis went to three games, some lasting up to three hours, and the final eventually got underway about 3.50pm. Whether or not the fact that



David Turner is presented with his trophy for the handicap event at the Northern Week by Sheila Black.

England kicked off at 4.00pm was an influencing factor is unknown, but the final was completed in 75 minutes. Reg showed his mastery of Golf Croquet by playing eight best-of-threes and not dropping a single game. The weather remained very warm and dry throughout, and thankfully Thursday's wind also died away.

The shot of the tournament must go to Charlie von Schmeider who in his playoff with Nelson Murrow for a place in the last eight, managed a jump from B-baulk with a single bounce over Nelson's ball which was jawed in hoop 11 with the score at 5-5 in the third game. Charlie's ball finished just 5 ft past hoop 12.

David Hopkins and Samantha Curry won the Golf Croquet Open Doubles Championship

After six rounds of a Swiss format, two pairs, last years champions Roy Ware and Tim King plus David 'Hoppy' Hopkins and Samantha Curry both emerged with five



Handicap doubles winners Ian Lines and John Larmouth at the Northern Week

wins from six games. In accordance with the tournament conditions this resulted in a play off which was won 7-3 by Hoppy and Sam. Conditions throughout the day were dry but extremely windy.

Not The Crake Valley Cumbria Cup Report

17th-18th June 2006

by Peter Dorke

In Penny Bridge did Quarryman
A croquet tournament decree:
Where Crake, the sacred river ran
And Haslam, measureless to man,
Played by the elder tree.

So three fine lawns on fertile ground
With boundaries were girdled round:
And there was boggy land of rushes full
With sheep long exiled from their native hills;
And here did black cows dodge the lusty bull,
And wish that they had contraceptive pills.

But O, that pleasure-dome and its new toilet
A darkling place: they haven't gone electric,
But running water and the gas to boil it!
Food that the players eyes with joy lit
And humour one might deem eclectic.

And on these lawns, with ceaseless turmoil
seething,
Some in tight shorts that must constrict their
breathing,
The players burst prophesying mayhem
To which Barmitzvah Boy replied amen
Chomping huge fragments of his kosher grub
And wishing that he'd never left the pub.

And mid these mallet-swinging aging clowns
The Glacier glides unheeding of their frowns
Nine hoops meandering with a mazy motion
And sweeping all before his languid pace

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Publication details

The Croquet Gazette is published six times per year, in February, April, June, August, October and December.

Publication Schedule
Copy should reach the Editor before the 21st of the month before publication is due. However if you have something that you think the editor may be willing to expand this deadline for please contact her direct before making any assumption.

Specific Questions and Queries
Specific questions or queries should be sent direct to the Editor. 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. Both black and white and coloured prints or

photographs can be used. Slides are no longer acceptable. Photocopies of pictures or print outs of digital images cannot be accepted. If using digital photography please send in jpeg or tiff format files. Please accompany all images with a description of the subject of the picture. If you require any material to be returned please enclose a SAE.

Tournament Reports & Results
Emailed reports are welcomed. Attachments may be sent in Microsoft Word format, text format. Hand written reports are no longer acceptable due to the illegibility of most.

Delivery Queries
Queries regarding the delivery of the Gazette to members should be directed to the Secretary of the Croquet Association and not to the Editor.

Disclaimer
The opinions expressed in the Croquet Gazette are those of the Editor and contributors. The Croquet Association is not responsible for statements other than those clearly defined as being made on behalf of The Croquet Association.

The Croquet Gazette is printed by Billingham Press, Central Avenue, Billingham, Stockton on Tees.

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<http://www.croquet.org.uk/>

THE CROQUET GAZETTE



Issue 304 August 2006 £3.00

Front Cover: Robert Fulford on his way to winning the British Open Championship. Photos in this issue by: Peter Dorke, Samir Patel, Ashton Hulme, Carter Moody, John Spiers, Tim King, Derek Watts,

Next Issue Published 24th October 2006

Copy Deadline 18th September 2006

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Chairman's Column

The story that John Prescott had been playing croquet at Dorneywood broke just after I wrote my previous column, while a good number of us were playing in the Inter-Counties at the end of May. Many thanks to all of you who contacted, or responded to requests for interviews from, the media. Although there was concern about the tone of some of the coverage, we did get the opportunity to put positive points across, though my interviewer was understandably more interested in the views of a Labour MP. On balance, I'm sure the publicity was helpful in increasing awareness of the game: sales of garden croquet equipment apparently boomed and hopefully the interest will eventually filter through to clubs.

The Deputy Prime Minister passed within a few yards of me when leaving St. Pauls at the end of the service of thanksgiving for the Queen's 80th Birthday, but I did not get a chance to speak to him! Nevertheless, I very much enjoyed and felt privileged to attend the service and similarly had a splendid day at Wimbledon. The scale of those championships was in fascinating contrast to that of ours, the more so given their common heritage, not least in the invention of the lawn mower.

You should find the notice of the AGM in this issue, together with two ballot papers. The first is to elect five members of

Council to serve for a three year term (there are fifteen members in all who are elected by individual associates, together with 9 regional representatives, elected by clubs). It is Council that runs the Association on your behalf, not only in its three full meetings each year but to a large extent through its committees, which are chaired and mostly staffed by its members, so please take time to read the statements provided by the candidates and return your ballot paper to the CA office in good time (the rules do not currently provide for electronic voting and note that you cannot vote at the meeting itself).

The other ballot paper is for a change to the Association's rules which I hope will be uncontentious. On reading through them after taking office, our President noticed that there appeared to be nothing in our objects to sanction international involvement: they refer solely to activities within the Domain. The proposed additional clauses are to rectify this omission. Unlike in the election for members of Council, both individual members and clubs may vote on this resolution, either by post beforehand or at the meeting itself.

Ian Vincent



Editorial

Well we finally got the long hot summer we all wish for. Waterproofs have been banished for some weeks now and hopefully we are all taking the necessary precautions regarding protecting ourselves from the sun with various lotions, hats and even clothing with protective properties, which enable us to enjoy the fine weather without harming ourselves. Alas I doubt some of our courts have not been so lucky and are now showing the ravages of the weather, unless of course there is an automatic watering system which is in an area where its use is permitted. I have seen much in the course of my work as a gardener recently that would be described as a lawn, most are simply scorched areas of grass or worse. My own sad patch which is given about as much care as I can spare is liberally sprinkled every other evening, but alas cannot keep up with the scores of feet that walk and play on it, so

I have my suspicions that many clubs are struggling to keep their courts in good condition generally, let alone where hoops are sited. I share the frustrations of the grounds people who are attempting to keep the courts in the manner we have become accustomed for summer events, but equally hope we can accept the difficulties that they have encountered, with or without watering restrictions, and accept that conditions may be more difficult than in previous years. If the weather continues to be hot and sunny hopefully we can all enjoy it while it is here, for it will be all too soon before waterproofs are the order of the day again



David Openshaw is presented with his trophy by Evelyn Martin and Cynthia Street

who battled for supremacy refereed by a rather sunburned Evelyn. David's hoop running gave him the edge over Dick and the final score after a nail-biting fifteen minutes at the thirteenth hoop, was 6/7 7/5 7/6. Chris Sheen beat Mark Hamilton for 3rd place 7/6, 7/6 and John Moore was the winner of the Plate.

Scottish Open 2006 Meadows CC, Edinburgh, 15-16 July

Report by Chris Dent and Bruce Rannie

A maximum field of fourteen players gathered for the 2006 Scottish Open - eight Scots including exiles, five English, and Joern Vinnen who was visiting from Germany. "The courts were of a good overall pace (for the technically minded, timed at 10-11 seconds at 1030) which proved testing, particularly as they sped up under a hot sun later in the day. Rather oddly, the Omega hoops were putting up some resistance" - Samir Patel.

All of the seeds survived the single game first round, the closest scoreline being Martin Murray's +16 against David Appleton. Martin M and Bob Burnett both managed to hit the peg with their peeles before the end of almost-TP turns, the former on the way to Rover, the latter for (we think) the first competitive TP grievous at Meadows. Both however succeeded with triples in subsequent plate games.

The first quarter-final to start (and also the last to finish) was Patel-Rannie, Samir taking the third after Bruce failed an opportunistic TPO which began with a 20 yard 4b peel while placing an escape ball for the TP on partner. Bob had a clinical

+26tp in the first against Dave Nick, but Dave took the remaining games to go through. After a slightly scrappy first, David Magee took the second +26tp to defeat Chris Dent, the triple game being even more notable for seeing no croquet strokes until turn 11. Meanwhile, David Openshaw was looking in ominous form following his defeat in the final the previous year, beating Martin M +26 +25tp.

David O continued as he had left off in the quarters, beating Dave Nick +21tp +13. Meanwhile Samir was playing himself into form ("I had been approaching hoops from bits of the court I never usually visit") taking a tense first against David M +3tp and a clinical second +25tp, David's point being a POP (peel on opponent).

Outside the main event, Brian Murdoch was riding high in the consolation event, and Fergus McInnes had the best single result by a non-seed, a +14 victory over Martin M. In amongst his customary 'wrong side of bed' games manager Chris completed two TP's to tie with David O and Samir for the peeling prize (and awarded it to himself, the others having taken other prizes as finalists.) Ray Lowe had a



David Openshaw with the Moffat Mallet (the oldest croquet trophy)

successful first venture North of the border, winning half of his games, and Joern was delighted to win his final game +13 against Martin Stephenson (a number of us are looking forward to the possibility of some croquet in Germany next year.)

The final was an exciting affair, both players having chances as David eventually triumphed +15 -17 +19 over Samir. After

being the beaten finalist in 2005, this year he was presented with the Moffat Mallet, the oldest croquet trophy in the world.

Meanwhile, in the plate semis Chris and Bruce had qualified to play Dave and David M respectively. Neither of these was close, Bruce and Dave winning +26 and +23. The latter did not take the chances he was given in the final, and Bruce continued his excellent run of form by winning the Edinburgh Plate +18.

The Compton Summer Tournament

28th June to 2nd July 2006

Report by Carter Moody.

The tournament attracted players from the Sussex County (Southwick), Hurlingham and Medway Clubs. This was the first tournament with the club's new Dawson balls and new Jaques hoops. The lawns were dry and fast, in spite of the crows pecking out the grass plugs from the old hoop holes every morning, and the weather was fine and sunny.

The Doubles Tournament, over the first two days was competed for by eight pairs, divided into two blocks of four. On day one, in Block A, Mark Hamilton and Daphne Gaitley had 26-0 win in their first match, and a comfortable win in the second on time. In Block B the first day ended with all four pairs registering one win each. The following morning in Block A, Mark and Daphne had their third win, also on time. In Block B - Graham Thompson and Tom Dixon, topped their group and qualified to play Mark and Daphne in the afternoon for the grand final. Tim Smith, the director, paired the second, third and fourth of each group against each other, with a prize for all four winners. The Kirke-Green Bowls were won by Mark and Daphne with four wins out of four.

In the Singles Advanced event, with fourteen entries, Roger Wood of Compton won the Horsburgh Cup, with six wins out of six, beating Roger Alexander of Medway in the final game. With the match fairly even, Roger had clips on 2 back and the peg, with Robert's both on 4 back. As time was called Robert narrowly missed the long lift at the opponents balls in corner 2 and Roger went on to peg-out in final turn.

Brian Stone, also of Compton won the Anstey Cup, for handicap play with four wins out of five. The result was in doubt right up to the end as any one of three players could have won.

The trophies were presented by Betty

The Italian Open Golf Croquet Championship

report by *Tim King*

The 2006 Italian Open attracted a record entry of 20 players from 10 countries. This might have been stretching the international flavour slightly, since the Luxembourg and Uruguayan entries seemed to have strong English roots but unquestionably there were representatives from South Africa, Belgium, France, Ireland, Scotland, England, Sweden and the



The players assembled at the end of a long days play

home country.

Initially there were four blocks of five players and the organisers bravely decided to use a best of three format for the block matches, which meant that a minimum of 80 and maximum of 120 games would have to be played on three lawns in one day. The prospects of achieving this deteriorated somewhat when the start of play was delayed by some 30 minutes. However, by the time play stopped at around 8pm when it was getting quite dark (and perhaps more importantly, threatening the start of the gala dinner), 39 of the 40 matches were complete. The remaining match was rescheduled for an 8am start the next day. All of the block winners were English which raised hopes of a success to offset the recent minor disappointment in the World Cup.

Sunday proved to be another hot day, taxing the endurance of even these highly tuned sportspeople close to their limits. The courts are adjacent to a large swimming pool complex which was understandably popular with local young people. Croquet players often took refuge from the heat under the trees that separated the two areas and coincidentally offered a fine vantage point of the scantily clad bodies. However, by late on Sunday as a gripping final unfolded it was the Italian locals in swimming costumes that gazed intently over the fence at the croquet duellists.

In the semi-finals Bill Arliss was set against the local champion, Gianpietro Donati, while Tim King took on Swedish superstar Anton Varnas. Bill shocked the Italian by romping to a 4-0 lead, only to see it evaporate to 4-4 before clinching a tense final hoop at 7-6. In the second game Donati piled on the pressure and won by 7-5. After many hours in the sun Bill seemed to be flagging but he kept on fighting and won the final game 7-4.

While Bill and Gianpietro had played three fast paced games, Tim and Anton were still in the middle of the second, despite starting earlier. Tim had taken the first game reasonably comfortably; Anton's superb clearance shots were offset by inconsistency in front of hoop. Eventually Tim prevailed in the

second game to set up an all English final, leading to an exodus by some of the local spectators.

The aggressive style of both players resulted in the final being played at a brisk pace and witnessed numerous spectacular clearances, enthusiastically approved by some of the spectators. Tim raced to a 5-1 lead in the first game but then visibly eased back, allowing Bill to regain confidence. Although Tim eventually won by 7-3 it seemed likely that the next game would be closer and so it proved.

Bill's improved form over the weekend was largely due to more reliability in front of hoops. In place of the old Arliss full power drive we are now seeing a delicate tap, which is certainly good news for the hoop setters! Bill gained a narrow advantage initially in the second game but Tim responded strongly to go 6-5 up. Bill gained control of hoop 12 and tried to set up the rush back to 13, whereupon Tim engineered a legitimate shot of blue into corner 3. Bill cannily played for time and Tim avoided (rightly) the temptation to peel yellow through with black. Ultimately, Tim managed to get both balls to runnable positions in front of 13 and Bill needed to clear from the boundary - a shot with which he typically has at least 75% accuracy. But not this time. So Tim King was crowned as the very worthy champion while Bill could take solace in the improvement in his ranking and a not inconsiderable share of the prize money.

Jane Shorten won the Plate competition, beating a less than gallant Italian in the final.

Overall, this was a most enjoyable event. Our Italian hosts never panicked when the timetable seemed to be falling apart, the hospitality was generous and the standard of croquet was consistently high.

Ramsgate Golf Croquet Championship

JUNE 10th & 11th 2006

Report by *Cynthia Street*

With one player dropping out because his heart by-pass wouldn't wait and two other players retiring after play had started, Evelyn Martin - managing her first major championship- had to return to the drawing board several times. With real stoicism she regarded these events as a 'sharp learning curve' and is not deterred from managing events in future.

Fortunately once play got under way on Sunday play progressed smoothly. The sun shone relentlessly and several hotly contested games were fought out between perspiring players. Both semis and the final went to 3 close games. The final was watched by a sizeable crowd, who were lucky enough to be able to seek shelter from the sun. Not so Dick Strover and David Openshaw



Tim King, Winner of the Italian Open Golf Croquet Championship

Letters

The birth of the World Croquet Federation

Brian Storey, in his interview 'Talking Croquet' with Bob Altman, published in the December 2005 Gazette, referred to the formation of the World Croquet Federation. This prompted me to refresh my memory of the events leading up to the inaugural meeting of the WCF at Hurlingham on 15 July 1989, at which I was present. It also raises the question 'Just how does an organisation such as the WCF come into being'?

The idea of forming a World Federation had doubtless been mooted several times, but it was Andrew Hope who decided in 1985 that the time was ripe for a thorough exploration of the possibilities. He took the initiative of writing to the Australian and New Zealand Croquet Councils, suggesting that a meeting between representatives of the CA, ACC, and NZCC should take place at the end of the 1986 MacRobertson Shield Tour, which was to be held in England.

This meeting was held on 17 July 1986. By this time Andrew had become Chairman of the CA, and he duly chaired the meeting. Representatives from Scotland, Ireland, the United States, South Africa, Japan and Switzerland attended by invitation.

A draft constitution had been prepared by Andrew, ably assisted by Stephen Mulliner. This was discussed in detail, and a number of issues were raised, including a statement of objectives, eligibility for joining the WCF, voting rights, officers and committees, subscriptions and the frequency of meetings.

In order to carry matters forward, it was agreed that the CA's International Committee, consisting of myself as Chairman, Nigel Aspinall, Andrew Hope, Martin Murray and Stephen Mulliner, should act as a Steering Committee, with the responsibility of producing further drafts of the constitution and preparing the way for the formal setting up of the WCF.

This was the seminal meeting which ensured the eventual formation of the WCF. Chris Hudson had acted as secretary, and the minutes of that meeting, which had ranged over the many issues involved in

welding together, with a common sense of purpose, the widely disparate organisations involved, formed a template for what followed.

It was to be nearly three years before the finally agreed version of the constitution emerged, after much tireless drafting and consultation with various governing bodies.

It was eventually arranged that a meeting should take place during the inaugural World Championship, held at Hurlingham in 1989, at which the WCF would come into being. This meeting was attended by 22 delegates from the following countries.

England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, United States, Canada and South Africa.

John Solomon took the chair as acting President.

The following countries were admitted to membership.

Full Members	Observer Members
Australia	Canada
England	France
Ireland	Italy
Japan	Jersey
New Zealand	South Africa
Scotland	
United States	

A Management Committee was elected with the following membership.

President Mr A.D.J. Heenan
OBE New Zealand

Secretary-General Mr C. Hudson
England

Mr R. Carter USA
Brig. CJ. Miles Australia
Mr F.J. Rogerson Ireland
Prof. M. Ikeda Japan

Chris Hudson remained in post as Secretary-General for the next twelve years, and during that time contributed a huge amount towards the development of the WCF.

The WCF owes much to the vision and foresight of Andrew Hope, whose steadfastness and patience overcame all the difficulties that were encountered. Andrew still continues his work for the WCF by acting as its Treasurer.

Bernard Neal

When is a prize not a prize

Dear Mr. Hudson, towards the end of the last century I retired from serious croquet and withdrew to the Shropshire fastnesses to write a treatise on the management of

tournaments, which, some of your older readers may faintly remember, was one of my more progressive contributions to the game. After a decade of earnest endeavour I had got no further than Chapter One: Making Sure you Get A Free Lunch, and so decided it was time to make a comeback. Accordingly, I signed up for several A-class tournaments, including that which was concluded yesterday at Northampton under the management of a Mr Tibble, whom I knew in the old days as one of the younger, promising hackers. I have to report, with great reluctance but someone has to speak out, that while Mr. Tibble's croquet may have improved a smidgeon his perception of what is fair and honourable does him no credit. To be frank, sir, the man is a cad.

I had not expected success to come easily in this my first CA tournament for many years and was therefore delighted to discover that I had done well enough to qualify for one of the valuable prizes offered, viz: The Special Consolation Booby Prize. This was to be - and I have the manager's word on this in the presence of witnesses, several of whom were sober - a banana. This being a delicacy which many Britons have not tasted since before Hitler's War, you may imagine my delight at the prospect. It made totally worthwhile the enormous effort involved in losing all seven of my games, despite the attempts of several of my opponents to throw the match and thwart my ambitions.

So far so satisfactory, but here's the rub, Hudson dear old thing: When I stepped forward proudly but humbly to collect my Special Consolation Booby Prize - you won't believe this and nor would any right-minded croquet player - the unspeakable bounder of a manager had given my banana to another competitor. AS DESSERT!

This would never have happened at Cheltenham. Southport possibly, but never at Cheltenham.

Sir, much as I hate to split on a fellow hacker, the the thing had to be said. If Council decides to impose some form of penalty for this ungentlemanly behaviour, might I suggest that keelhauling would be appropriate for someone of Mr. Tibble's former profession.

Yours regretfully,

Peter Dorke

Hudson, banana? Can't wait to read the book on tournament management. Ed

Letters continued on page 11

News & Information



John Prescott, Eat Your Heart Out: Garden Croquet To Die For.

By Peter Dorke

When, over a decade ago, Fred Smith persuaded the Longmynd Hotel to let him set up the Church Stretton Croquet Club on their rather awful lawn, his ambition was for a modest one lawn club of about 25 members. He achieved this quite quickly and - though members came and went - the club prospered and gave enormous pleasure to players of a wide range of enthusiasm and skill. Fees stayed low, equipment was basic, the club did not affiliate to the CA. There was not much point in doing so, as competitive croquet - apart from internal ladders and knockouts - was confined to the annual duel with Shrewsbury CC, the A49 Challenge. A very few members joined the CA and went to tournaments. There was, however a strong social side and it became a very happy place to play croquet - or just sit and watch croquet: 25 players to one lawn means very precise organisation and plenty of opportunity to practise spectating.



All this came to an abrupt end this year, when the management of the hotel took back the lawn and turfed out the club. Warned of this but surprised by the haste with which they were bundled out, the club was already involved in negotiations with the South Shropshire District Council over a couple of mouth-watering plots on the local recreation ground. The possibility of two well-laid lawns was mooted and the search for finance began. It seemed the right moment to affiliate with the CA.

All well and good, but it looked as though all play would have to be suspended for the 2006 season. Until the club received an offer it could not refuse from the Acton family of Acton Scott, just down the A49 from Church Stretton, and near the wonderful Acton Scott Farm Museum. The club members were offered the use, once a week, of the family's huge croquet lawn (about a lawn and a half).

A real garden croquet lawn, this: thick, heavy, spongy, slow; murder to roll, suicide to try to run a hoop from more than six inches; three hoop breaks a major achievement. But what a setting: a lovely house with that graceful air of decay that no amount of money can fake. Must have stood there for 500 years. And outplayers can look at the view across to Wenlock Edge, if they can't bear to watch the hilarious frustrations of their opponents.

When the Church Stretton members get their new lawns, they will cherish the memory of these pleasant evenings at Acton Scott. You don't have to be Deputy Prime Minister to enjoy a good game of garden croquet.

Country Club Johannesburg now a "croquet hotel"

Due to the fast expansion of croquet at Country Club in Johannesburg it was finally acknowledged by the management that one lawn was just not enough. After moving a road, a hedge and a ditch, space was found for two more alongside the existing one in the croquet and bowls complex.

By the time you read this, all three will be undergoing their final spring treatment to put them in tip-top condition for play in November.

CCJ croquet members are able to offer bona fide croquet players, and non-playing partners, reciprocity in regard to all the facilities at Auckland Park (see the website www.ccj.co.za) and they look forward to welcoming old friends and new.

Chris Bennett will be on hand to organise demand-led fixtures between November and March this coming season. The idea is for U.K. players looking for a winter break to get together and say when they would like to come, and for how long. Association events could be played either level or handicap, golf events might also appeal - or a combination of the two. Numbers would be made up with local players - with handicap ranges 0 to 16 - and bespoke tournaments would emerge.

Chris will also be happy to give coaching in both association and golf.

For non-playing partners CCJ is an ideal venue just to chill out with a book by the pool or a stroll around the gardens. The staff will be happy to give advice on shopping trips and visits to local places of interest.

CA Merit Awards

Roger Staples (Middlesbrough CC) achieved a notable feat in the recent Tyneside Midweek Handicap Tournament by qualifying for a Bronze Award and a Silver Award in the same match. This has been done before, the last time by Patrick Swales at the Surbiton Easter Tournament in 2004 - coincidentally Patrick won the Tyneside event this time.

However, Roger's game provides a useful reminder about the conditions for the Silver Award. He was playing David Appleton, receiving seven bisques, and had used two to make 11 hoops with the first ball (qualifying for the Bronze Award). The

After the presentations, in which attractive engraved glass pyramids were awarded along with the usual trophies, at approximately 5.30, the doubles final began. Chris, Keith and Jonathan had been waiting over 7 hours for their match.

The Doubles Final was a slightly scrappy affair, though with the highlight being 9 consecutive long roquets being hit, though also several errors. Game 1 started with a Clarke supershot ball, 2nd turn ball to the middle of East boundary followed by misses in turns 3 and 4 and Clarke hitting 5th turn, but failing to approach hoop2. Then Kirby hit and went around, Rob hit and went around with two POPs, Keith hit and failed hoop 3 (having had to approach from hoop2 after clipping a ball he was trying to take off behind), Rob hit and put a ball off with an awful croquet stroke, Keith hit and failed to approach hoop3, and Chris hit and finished.

Game 2, supershot opening by Aiton and Kirby hit Clarke's peg-high east boundary ball and went around 3rd turn. Fulford hit and went around with one POP and leaving Kirby's ball on the back of hoop1, Aiton's ball near west boundary south of 2 and a rush to it from east boundary. Keith missed the first shot since turn 4 of game 1, and Clarke finished with another TP.

General comments

As usual, the catering at the event was excellent - despite the late withdrawal this year of Cliff Jones due to ill health. All at the event wished him a speedy recovery, and the ladies at the Cheltenham club rallied marvellously to provide lunches, teas and evening meals (which were sponsored by Mitsubishi Motors).

Two minutes of silence were observed at 10am on July 7th in remembrance of the 2005 London bombings.

Chris Clarke achieved the most peeling finishes in an Opens, with 22 TPs, while Reg won the peeling trophy for his 7 sextuples in the tournament.

Tactical developments in the last couple of seasons in the UK include:

- Rob on sextuples peeling 1back before roqueting his hoop2 pioneer and making hoop2

- A frequent response (possibly most commonly used at this years Opens) to a supershot opening being a ball about peg-high on the East boundary

There were very few tice openings, though many corner 2 responses to a first turn east-boundary ball. Shooting was so strong, and the lawns so easy that leaves were vital, as demonstrated in both games of the Fulford and Clarke v Lines and Lewis doubles final. Game 1: Lines got to 4back, and Lewis to the peg before Fulford hit in and finally made a break. He pegged Lewis out, leaving Clarke's ball directly south of 3-back and his ball in corner 2. Lines took off from Clarke's ball, took long position then failed 4-back after the oppos joined up, and Clarke finished in the next turn. In the next game Fulford broke down on a sextuple with his ball on 3back and Clarke's on 4back. Lines went around and had a leave with Fulford's ball at hoop2 (with Lewis for hoop 2) - forcing Rob to play, and giving him the opportunity to finish that turn, which he did.

After some discussion as to whether Rob had entered the 'older half' of the tournament, it was decided that the median age in the event was about 47, with much promise for the future of UK croquet being shown by Evans and Wicks who have both had excellent patches this year.

Concluding remarks

Overall, the standard of play in the tournament was generally excellent, aided by the weather-induced easy lawns and forgiving hoops, with many quick games and the standard of shooting such that players resorted to east boundary replies or 2nd turn breaks in response to supershot openings. The British MacRob players were in excellent form with Robert and Jonathan hitting most long shots, and the doubles pairings looking very solid. The final provided plenty for croquet fans to watch and tacticians to pick over, and Robert showed an impressive level of concentration and stamina to win both the Singles and Doubles events (for the 7th time). The generosity of sponsors Mitsubishi Motors was acknowledged - they provided shirts for players and officials, evening meals for players and trophies. Next year, a return to Hurlingham and, if the rumours are to be believed, the return of Richard Hilditch to the manager's chair.

Sidmouth Mid-Summer Handicap 19-24 June 2006

report by Amanda Haste

There was concern in the Sidmouth camp when, only two weeks before the Open Tournament was due to start, we heard that manager Cliff Jones had been summoned to hospital. Julie Horsley bravely stepped into the breach and ran events without a hitch; Cliff's op went well and he was able to put in an appearance for Finals Day. The weather remained dry and sunny if a little chilly at times - the longest day of the year was also the coldest - and the tournament produced some very close fought games with no less than seven 'golden hoop' finishes.

In the A Block Peter Francis (Cheltenham) won all six games in the block and faced Graham Roberts (Cheltenham) in the best-of-three final. Graham started strongly but Peter fought back and won the first game +3 on time. In the second game Graham stormed back in the closing turn to win +11 on time; unfortunately Peter could not stay to play the decider and Graham sportingly agreed to share the honours, sharing the Derek Challenge Cup. The B Block had been won by Barbara Young (Bury) for the past two years but it was not to be third time lucky and Sylvia Steer (Bowdon) beat her in a hard-fought final +5 on time to take the David Rawkins Cup.

Geoff Young (Bury) took a strong lead in the C Block final, with Peter Hills (Sidmouth) fighting back to be equal on time. However he was foiled by Geoff running the golden hoop of the Tournament. In the D Block manager Julie Horsley (Budleigh) showed she could play as well as manage, defeating Vera Henderson (Sidmouth) +7 on time for the Dwerryhouse Cup.



Gwynneth Dart & Doug Sinclair, of Sidmouth

The Egyptian was won by Ian Price (Ramsgate) and the Handicap Singles Knockout by Barbara Young (Bury), with Nancy Temple (Sidmouth) as runner up. And finally....after three beaten finalists, Sidmouth provided a winning team in Gwynneth Dart and Doug Sinclair, victors in the Doubles event.

with TPs, and Leo McBride beat Marcus Evans in the best-of-three final.

The doubles consolation final looked all over when Ed Duckworth went around 4th turn, Patmore went around with one peel 6th turn, and Jenny Williams missed the "last lift" 7th turn. However, Ed proceeded to miss a 2-ish footer to give the Williams-Cordingley pairing some hope, but then hit the lift to win +17.

Singles Semis and Doubles matches

Both semis ended up rather one-sided: Reg hit 2/4 and made no errors winning 3-1 against Chris Clarke, while Fulford beat Maugham 3-0 after Maugham failed hoop1 3rd turn in game 1, and failed 1-back from nowhere when finishing in the third. In game 2, Rob went around, Dave hit in and decided to go around with a leave also, reasoning that the game odds were 50% whether he did this or had a TPO with 1-2 balls off.

In the doubles, all three likely pairings for the MacRobertson Shield team were in action, and all three reached the quarters – before Maugham and Avery were put to the sword by Bamford and Le Moignan. All three pairings impressed, with Jonathan and Robert shooting superbly, and Chris carrying over his solid finishing ability from the singles.

In the doubles semis, Tony showed some suggestion of nerves, Kirby shot very well, and Aiton was very solid to give the (probable) new Mac pairing a place in the doubles final against Fulford and Clarke.

The finals

Some close matches denied the Manager the opportunity to play the doubles final on the penultimate day, though hopes lingered that finals day would be complete before the football kicked off. But it was not to be. It was also not to be just "another boring Rob and Reg final".

Fulford and Bamford kicked off at 10.42 with a 3rd turn break by Reg. Preferring to do the extra peel to the risk of a less-structured pegged-out game, Reg stopped at 3-back with a spread. Rob clipped the inlawn ball shooting from A-baulk, raced around to 1-back and it looked like a +16SXP first game – until his Irish peel at rover found his striker's ball grovel through the hoop and then fall over to the side and end up on the left wire of hoop5. Rob then missed the hampered shot on his slightly southerly "side" ball. Reg made no mistakes to take the first game +2QP.

Rob then levelled things up with a 7th turn SXP in a game where no long shots were hit, and most of us settled into lunch. The players continued what was to be a marathon match with only a brief pause.

Game three was very entertaining after Rob shot gently and hit Reg's supershot ball second turn and embarked on a break. Despite some longish and angled hoops, the easy conditions meant he comfortably carried on the break until trying to get a rush out of 1-back he found himself hampered and opted to for a leave with Reg's ball a tice a few yards east of corner 2 and his own ball just out of corner 4. Reg hit the tice played a big croquet stroke sending partner down to about 2 yards North of hoop 1 and a yard off the west boundary and missed a 6 yarder leaving a double. +26QNP 4th turn to Rob.

Game 4 started a supershot ball and more missing, before Robert went to 1-back in the 5th turn. Reg missed, and Aiton and Kirby had just started warming up for the doubles final at 2.30pm when, in a lapse of concentration, Rob missed a cut-rush after 2-back with 4 peels completed. Reg won in two turns with a sextuple of his own to level the match at 2-2.

The decider saw the 5th consecutive supershot opening and the third East boundary response to it. This time Reg hit shooting down the boundary from corner 3 and it looked all over when he started a 5th turn quad. However, he surprisingly attempted a pretty wibbly looking stop-shot peel from a couple of feet back in which the peelee barely reached the hoop. With a deep ball and a side ball in place, however, he seemed well set to finish when he jumped the peelee to the boundary. Back in the clubhouse, however, Robert saw a glimmer of hope. The next few strokes will be long debated on the lawns as Reg opted to rush his deep ball short of rover, then on rushing the side ball north of the hoop he tried a promotion peel with something of a drive. Unluckily for him, he got a very clean contact and the peelee shot through the hoop – leaving him a rush towards corner 4. After rushing to a slightly flatter piece of ground, Reg's kind of half-roll pegout from about 10 yards started slightly off target and hilled further away, leaving his blue ball about 6 yards from B baulk near hoop2, and another ball between hoops 1 and 5. He opted to peg out the striker's ball, and set Robert the challenge of winning the Opens from 25-0 down in the last.



Chris Clarke & Robert Fulford on their way to their to another win the Doubles Championship

Rob's attempt to take contact from the ball at hoop2 was interrupted by Reg pointing out that only a lift was available. Despite this Rob hit and went to the peg leaving Reg near corner 3 wired from the peg and with only a very long shot into corner 1. He opted to corner in 4, and it looked ominous for him when Rob ran hoop 2 with a rush into corner 4. However, an imperfectly hit rush (to 2-3 yards north of corner 4), and an equally average take-off saw him taking croquet from Reg's ball in corner 4. Rob opted to smash blue off the west boundary level with hoop2, sending his own ball off south of partner near corner 4, leaving Reg a 16-ish yard shot at the peg for the Championship. Reg's shooting let him down again, however, and Robert held his nerve to win his 7th Open Championship title, and the assembled crowd to reflect on a fascinating final.

break for the second ball started without any bisques, and continued in this vein until he had completed all twelve hoops (potential Silver Award). However, he had not taken the opportunity to peel the first ball through Rover, although that had been feasible, preferring to concentrate on the solid twelve. If he had then used any bisques to peel Rover posthumously, and peg the two balls out, then the Silver Award would be invalidated, so he exited left, expecting that the remaining five bisques would be sufficient to win the game, thus completing the final condition for both Awards.

The conditions for the Silver Award do not allow the use of bisques in any part of the complete turn, to set up the break, during the break, or in the leave after the break - completing a peg-out is as solid a leave as one would wish for, so that has to be done without bisques!

Live video feed of the Open final - how was it for you?

by Dave Kibble

Twelve people tried to connect to the camera streaming live video of the Open final, six succeeded in connecting, some at different times, though I think four were all connected at about 11AM.

Viewers were in Australia, USA (in the Saturday test) and the UK.

For the camera at the quality setting used, bright sun was needed to see the balls. Picture quality was quite poor. Frame rate delivered about 3 frames per second - which was OK for following a break but nothing like "live action".

In conclusion, the up-link from the camera to the internet was not adequate bandwidth for the service, a future test should probably use the main server with repeater software taking a single feed from the camera.

Tim Murphy in Canberra, Australia adds: A big thank you for the web cam during the Open Final. The quality was awful, only a knowledgeable croquet player could have worked out what was going on but it was a step in the right direction and better than nothing at all.



Lighting the Fire of Association Croquet

By Joern Vinnen (President of the Deutscher Krocket Bund)

In June fourteen participants from as far as Berlin and the Westerwald (450 km distant) found their way to the three privately owned lawns of the Oldenburger Croquetfreunde at Ellens close to Wilhelmshaven, Germany to attend an Association Croquet Coaching Course.

Most of the players had experience in Golf Croquet though only a few ever played Association; a fact that was due to change during the weekend to come.

It was world class player, Colin Irwin, who most generously spent three days of his time at Ellens and the WCF that helped to sponsor the project through the WCF Development Programme.

Although the concepts of Association Croquet were not always easy to grasp, it was fun to come & to play, especially since each of the players was highly motivated and eager to learn. All the players were excited to try to play a break themselves. Blue sky, 25 C, carefully prepared lawns, good food and drink and an excellent dinner in the nearby hotel Friesische Wehde added to the demanding but very patient coaching experience that Colin provided to the future Association Croquet Champions.

All the players found it helpful that Colin spoke German throughout the weekend and by the end of Sunday, the participants started to believe Colin when repeating over and over: "If you do all the shots correctly there is not a single difficult shot - it's easy!"

Coaching and practise went on until sunset, and the good mood, food and drink also played a part. As usual at Ellens, this was provided by Dr. Frank Rothe and his wife Claudia and the Saturday evening ended with a delicious dinner for all who had worked so hard all day long.

After a short-tournament on Sunday the coaching ended on Sunday evening with all players getting a nice handcrafted certificate of participation.

Everybody went home, hungry for more, and it is to hope that the fruits of this coaching will be seen soon on the national level. All participants, as well as Deutscher Krocket Bund thank Colin, Dr. Rothe and his team and the WCF Development Programme for their enormous efforts.

Croquet Ban in House of Commons

A Commons motion praising croquet was banned from being tabled on June 22nd by Bob Russell, Lib Dem MP for Colchester, after officials claimed it mocked John Prescott.



THE LIVERPOOL PROJECT: PART 2

by James Hawkins

Continued from issue 303, June 2006.

Derek's Proposition

Liverpool City Council owns and operates more parks than they know what to do with. Clarke Gardens is way off the bottom of the priority list. No one at the Council knows what the park is for. Then along comes a stranger – me – and answers the question for them.

There's no way I can use all the buildings on site, but I've enough of an idea to ignite some fresh interest. So, in the short term at least, Derek has proposed the following agreement. I can introduce as many players as I want, to play as often as I want, on as many lawns as I want. He is happy for me to do that, free of charge. In return, he will reallocate maintenance staff from other areas, to carry out work on the field, getting up to a playable standard. Again, there will be no charge to the croquet club.



This aerial view of Clarke Gardens reveals a grassed area to the north with enough space for at least six croquet lawns. The walled garden (immediately below) could possibly accommodate a further six.

At the end of this year, he plans to submit a grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, to finance a feasibility study of around £50,000. (Apparently this is common practice among local authorities seeking assistance for large projects, and is usually viewed with sympathy by the grant-makers.) Assuming that proves fruitful, a report would be prepared, and resubmitted to the HLF around the middle of 2007. It is likely that that report would include provision for a croquet club within a restored complex of buildings, and it's likely that the club would have access to the walled garden. What's uncertain is the long-term use of the listed buildings around the site. The stable block could be converted to provide a garden centre or a craft village. The glasshouse could become the world's grandest, hottest, and most fragile croquet clubhouse. Or maybe it could be flattened.

The bottom line is this. I started this project with no lawns, no members, and no money. I've now got free access to a disused football pitch, allowing up to six lawns, with the possibility of an

upgrade to a further six deluxe, specially laid lawns within three years. The next step is the recruiting and training of my team of disciples.



The North lawns provide plenty of space for a start-up club. For long-term use, investment will be needed to improve drainage and the quality of the turf surface.

My head is swimming with ideas for the next stage, as Derek and I stand ankle-deep in nettles outside what may become the Liverpool Clubhouse. We leave, and he secures the gate. "Do you want the spare?" he asks, and hands me what was my symbolic target for forming the club. It's the key to the padlock.

An extended version of this article may be viewed online at www.croquetworld.com

HANDICAP ASSOCIATION COACHING – LESSON 4: DISASTER RECOVERY

by James Hawkins

I've a friend who drives me to despair with his style of play. I won't mention his name, so we'll call him Bob. He wins lots of games, and beats lots of strong opponents, but he's very bad at playing all of his shots, except for one. The only shot he's good at is his disaster-recovery shot.

This is a good position for Bob to be in. No matter how bad his last stroke was, he can recover control (after a fashion) with just a single shot. Of course, this relies on creeping through five-yard angled hoops, and rushing beyond balls he's accidentally placed on a distant boundary. For everyone else, there has to be an easier way of making up for a disastrous last shot.

The last few lessons in this series have discussed the ideal break: where to place the pivot ball, and how to use rushes and stop-shots to minimise the distance your ball has to move. Now we'll look at how to salvage a situation when you make that occasional bad shot.

Rescuing a bad pioneer

You're for Hoop 2 and you've just sent your pioneer to the next hoop. As soon as you play the shot, you realise you've not hit it hard enough. Rather than an easy approach at Hoop 3, you'll have to take off from three yards behind the hoop. There's a simple way out of this – your pioneer's not good enough, so replace it.

Continued on page 13

The Mitsubishi 2006 British Open Croquet Championship

Cheltenham July 2-9 2006

Report by Jenny Williams

The Opens returned to Cheltenham this year, ably managed again by David Maugham, and starting in sweltering conditions that suggested a challenging second half to the tournament might be possible. The lawns at the venue are continuing to improve, though hills still played a part in deciding many games. The back lawns were slightly crispy under foot in the first few days of competition. Unfortunately by lunchtime Wednesday it was raining heavily and the lawns never recovered. The high number of peeling turns reflect the very easy lawns and trivial hoops that prevailed the rest of the week.

The field of 43 included 3 Canadians, one Kiwi, and now NZ-resident Chris Clarke, as well as the return of Tony Le Moignan to tournament croquet on the British Mainland after an absence of several years. In a MacRobertson Shield year, the Opens also provided the opportunity for the British team to show what they were made of.

Early knockout rounds – excitement in the quarter finals

The singles KO started with very heavy rain, and rain delayed play until 10.30 when 3 lawns were slightly dubiously declared playable. However, the lawns quickly dried after the sun came out at midday, though all hopes of challenging lawns were gone.

The seeding committee had met after the block stages and surprisingly omitted MacRob player Avery in favour of Marcus Evans in the 8 seeds. Marcus overcame a shaky start (game and break down) to get through his first match against Matt Burrow before succumbing to David Maugham 3-1 in the quarter final. Marcus found his own entertainment in the tournament by frequently TPOing and pegging out two balls. Last season he explained that he did this because he wasn't so confident about tactics in the pegged out 2 vs 1 game. For now, however, the big crowd-pleasing hit-ins and hacking through long hoops seems Marcus's forte, and he rescued games against Ian Lines (2back vs rover at one stage), and Ed Duckworth (3b vs rover) as well as winning the first game of the Z final against Leo with this tactic. The tactic came undone in the doubles however, when he TPO'd Robert Fulford and pegged both balls out giving James a 7 hoop lead over Chris. This was largely due to a very poor miss of a 1/3rd ball at 2b by James, which offered Chris a finishing break.

After spending last season organising the World Champs, Phil Cordingley returned to the lawns with a world ranking of 177. This meant that his victory over 10th-ranked Ian Lines was something of a shock. He also caused minor palpitations for David Maugham levelling their quarter-final match overnight with a 17TP win, though David won the decider comfortably 26TP.

The other big surprise of the tournament was a flawless



Ed Duckworth



Marcus Evans

victory by Tony Le Moignan over Keith Aiton in the second round of the knockout. Further, Tony's shooting gave him the possibility of a 3-0 whitewash of Chris Clarke in the quarter-finals, though these opportunities were undone by errors during break play.

Reg Bamford's swing trainer was nowhere in sight as he missed many shots in his match with Ed Duckworth, and was saved in the fifth game when Ed, having had the first break, failed hoop1 after Reg missed another lift. Reg shot at partner near East boundary (missing), but Ed had little choice but to shoot at Reg's balls from hoop1, and Reg finished with a sextuple in two turns to claw his way into the semis.

Robert Fulford looked in an equally worrisome position when Mulliner was taking a 3rd turn ball round in their decider in the last 16. However, Stephen broke down after being hampered out of hoop 3 to lose to a Fulford SXP. Robert then went 2-0 down in his quarter against Kirby in the first 11 turns of a high-quality match. All games featured supershot openings, the first two with Jonathan hitting everything and Rob missing both his lifts. However, the tide turned and Jonathan's only roquets were in turn 2 of the 3rd and 5th games. In game 3 Rob pushed for a POP 3rd turn, and didn't make 3-back, but the shortish shot was missed (+25QP), in the next game croquet was taken in the 4th turn, two POPs, +24SXP, and the match was all over after a 5th turn TP in the last. In the other quarter final, Maugham comfortably saw off Marcus Evans's challenge 3-1.

In the consolation events

After his early exit in the main event, Keith Aiton spent several games working on his sextupling and octupling skills. Apart from two successes (both against David Harrison-Wood), Keith's experimentation offered opportunities which opponents generally took advantage of. Indeed, Keith achieved a rare "Canadian Triple" – with all three Canadian players completing TPs against him (though only two in the 5th turn).

Also strutting his stuff was James Death, who came within a rover peel of completing three consecutive sextuples, one of them 5th turn. He also had a 4th turn finish in a doubles game with

partner Marcus Evans. James felt slightly unlucky in his match against Sarah Burrow who took a very solid break around 3rd turn after James dribbled at her supershot ball and missed. Hitting the lift he proceeded to 1-back with a standard leave – which Sarah hit and took her hoop 1 ball to the peg. James hit again and laid again for a sextuple – and Sarah hit her second tea-lady shot which gave her a very easy finish. Completing the Z sextuple fest was Samir Patel who found solace in failing to make the knockout stages by completing his first tournament SXP.

The usual very unbalanced plate draw (first round losers in the KO go into the process only, leaving the draw to non-qualifiers only) led to the Z knockout (top 8 available players based on manager Dave's Swiz programme) on the final days being somewhat stronger on paper. After battling rather solidly including a TP over Chris Patmore to win the Draw, Steve Lewis succumbed a Patmore TP in the Plate final. In the Z KO, 7/9 games finished

**Men's & Women's Championships
Budleigh Salterton June 8th-11th 2006**

Report By David Magee

Jamie Birch missed the peg out in the first game against Fulford in the Semi-finals, when Fulford was on 1 and 1. He had one more shot in the game, from corner 3 into a trap.

James Death beat Marcus Evans +24sxp in the final of the Du Pre, which was played between games 2 and 3 of the main event final. All was over by 1pm!

James won the final in great style, laying for a delayed sextuple. Marcus replied by jumping hoop 1 to hit partner, but unfortunately went off the lawn in the subsequent break. James finished his sextuple with a straight TP, peeling Penult by less than a foot from 2-3 yards at 30 degrees. A rush allowed him to jaws a long Rover peel, then roquet a ball by the peg to approach to an easy-to-jump position - it was routine for James and he made it look effortless to the thrilled crowd.

Earlier in the tournament, Marcus had completed from a similar position using a rush to cannon the peelee to a good Rover-peel position.



Robert Fulford on his way to his fourth Men's Championship

Jamie Burch and Jack "Wixy" Wicks showed consolidation of their continuing improvement by reaching the semi-finals, Jack beating No.2 seed Keith Aiton in a good match. Jack was understandably disappointed with the final, but Robert gave no



Jack Wicks (Runner-up in the Men's Championship), Lousie Bradforth (Women's Champion) and James Death (Winner of the Du Pre)

quarter and Jack had to hit 18+ yard shots from cold to take croquet.

Dave Trimmer also showed significant continuing improvement, completing several TPs in the week, and he only just missed out on the opportunity to make it an all-Trimmer Du Pre knockout by losing a late evening decider game against Women's champion Louise Bradforth. Dave, Pete's older brother, already has his name on the Du Pre trophy, despite never entering before - due to a mis-communication last time Pete won it!

Keith Aiton reports on the Men's final: Conditions were green and spongy. Rob won the toss and chose to go in 1st and 3rd games. Wixy put Rob in in the 2nd game. Rob put out a supershot ball in each game. Wixy put out a similar length ball to the west of 5 in the 1st and 3rd games, and went to corner 2 in the 2nd game. Rob hit (his partner ball in the 1st and 3rd games and Wixy's ball in the 2nd game) and went to 4-back leaving his standard leave. Wixy missed fourth turn in each game (two "short" shots and one "long" shot) and Rob finished each time, although his TPs weren't entirely without incident (37 minutes, 45 minutes and 33 minutes for the games.)

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Croquet Association will take place at the Hurlingham Club on Saturday 14th October 2006 commencing at 11.00 a.m.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence.**
2. **Minutes of the previous meeting held on Saturday 15th October 2005.**
Copies will be available at the meeting or on the Website and will be sent to Home Members on written request to the Secretary.
3. **Chairman's Report.**
4. **Accounts for the year to December 2005 and Treasurer's report.**
These accounts and brief commentary were published in the Croquet Gazette. Copies will be available at the meeting and a more comprehensive report will be sent to Home members on written request to the Secretary.
5. **Election of Treasurer.**
Dr R W Bray offers himself for re-election.
6. **Election of Reporting Accountant.**
7. **Change to Rules.**
Proposed by I G Vincent and seconded by J Isaacs. That the following be inserted at the end of Rule 1 (Constitution and Objects) of the Croquet Association:
(f) To represent the interest of its members and promote development of croquet internationally.
(g) To enter individuals and teams in international events to represent nations or groups of nations associated with the Domain and to host and support such events
A postal ballot of individual associates and member clubs is required for this motion, which requires a 6 to 4 majority to be passed. A ballot paper is printed in the Gazette and will be sent to member clubs.
8. **Election of Council Members.**
The following four members retire in rotation under rule 18 (a)(1) Mr.R Hoskyns, Mr.B Fisk, Mr D Trotman and Mr. J Dawson. All retiring members are seeking re-election under Rule 18 (a)(1). Mr A Fathers resigned from Council during the year. Mrs P Duke-Cox (proposed by Dr I G Vincent and seconded by Mr J Isaacs) Dr.T King (proposed by Mr WH Arliss and seconded by Mrs P Duke-Cox) and Mr D Strover (proposed by Ms J Blake and seconded by Mr D S Old), are standing for election to Council. There are therefore 7 candidates for 5 positions and a ballot will be held. A ballot paper is included in this copy of the Gazette and on the CA Website. All candidates were offered the opportunity to submit a photograph and election address and these are reproduced in this copy of the Gazette and also on the CA Website. All ballot papers must reach the Secretary's office no later than the first post on 4th October 2006. The result will be announced at the AGM.
9. **Benefactor's Book.**
The names of benefactors will be read.
10. **Presentation of Apps and Steel Memorial Bowls.**
11. **Presentation of Croquet Association Diplomas.**

12. Any Other Business.

13. President's Closing Address.

Klim Seabright
Secretary
24 July 2006

BALLOT FORM

Introduction:

This motion is being proposed, following discussion at Council, to rectify an apparent omission in the objects of the Association, which currently omit reference to international activities.

The following motion is being proposed by IG Vincent and seconded by J.Isaacs:

That the following be inserted at the end of Rule 1 (Constitution and Objects) of the Croquet Association:

- (f) To represent the interests of its members and promote development of croquet internationally.
- (g) To enter individuals and teams in international events to represent nations or groups of nations associated with the Domain and to host and support such events.

For the Motion

Against the Motion

Please place a cross in the appropriate box.

This ballot paper must be returned to the Secretary's Office no later than the 4th October 2006.

All Associates who live in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, The Isle of Man and Channel Islands are eligible to vote. They may photocopy this form where more than one ballot paper is required per household (or download from the CA Website).

All Member Clubs of the CA are eligible to vote and will receive a Ballot paper through the post

Signature

Name.....

Send your vote to the CA Office c/o Cheltenham Croquet Club, Old Bath Road, Cheltenham GL53 7DF

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THE CROQUET ASSOCIATION – VOTE TO ELECT COUNCIL MEMBERS. 2006/2009

Ballot Paper

There is the need to hold a ballot for the five vacancies on Council. This is because there are seven candidates for five vacancies.

Associates of the CA resident in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are eligible to vote.

You can vote by placing an “X” in the box next to the names of up to the five candidates of your choice.

If you require more than one ballot paper per household you may photocopy or download from the website. Each ballot paper must contain your name and signature.

J.P. Dawson*

P. Duke-Cox

B.P.E. Fisk*

R.F. Hoskyns*

T.M. King

R.G. Strover

D.W. Trotman*

* These members of Council are retiring by rotation from Council, but have expressed their wish continue on Council.

You ballot paper must reach the CA office no later than first post on the 4th October 2006.

The results will be announced at the AGM on the 14th October 2006 at the Hurlingham Club.

Name

Signature.....

Klim Seabright
CA Secretary

2006 ELECTION ADDRESSES

Jeff Dawson

I am a member of Woking Croquet club, and have been playing croquet for some 25 years, currently playing off a handicap of -2. I am also a championship and examining referee, and run referee courses in Woking from time to time. I currently run the CA shop from home, and have succeeded in increasing its profits by about 50% since I took it over 4 years ago. This is a full-time occupation during the summer months. This business means I am in constant contact with players and enthusiasts of all types in the UK and abroad.

I have served on the council for 3 years, and am currently chairman of the Marketing committee. I am also on the Admin committee, principally because I have helped to develop and currently maintain the database system used by the CA office. I am also on the Publishing committee, with my main interest here being the ongoing development of the CA website, and the publishing of new books which might be sold through the shop.

My main interest is with Association croquet, although I have also played a small amount of Golf Croquet. I do not share the fears of some that Golf Croquet will swamp and drive out Association Croquet – rather I think it has helped in the establishment of many new clubs, and the survival of others. However, I do not think that there is necessarily a natural progression from one form of the game to the other, so I think it is important that we continue to be active in promoting both disciplines.

Patricia Duke-Cox

Patricia has been proposed by Dr IG Vincent and seconded by Mr Isaacs

I have been a CA member since its centenary year of 1997, and have served on the CA Council as the East Midlands elected representative since October 2000.

I am a tournament player of both Golf and Association croquet. I have taken the opportunity to play in Austria, Egypt and Germany.

On Council I have served on the following committees:

- Development, the last three years as its Chairman
- Golf
- Administration, serving as Chairman
- Publishing
- Coaching
- Management
- Major Grants, serving as Co-ordinator

I decided a year ago to relinquish the post representing the East Midlands, to enable fresh talent in from the region, but I would like to continue to serve on Council as an independent member.

I hope my work on Development in particular has been appreciated. With the implementation of new initiatives including the New Club fund and Major Grants I have enjoyed the opportunity to go out and visit clubs that have been newly formed, relocated or been recipients of grants.

On a personal level I am a founder member of a small club in Lincolnshire where I have been chairman and secretary. I have also acted as the East Midlands Federation secretary.

Professionally I am qualified as a librarian and feel a duty of care towards the CA Archives, soon to benefit from the Tremaine Arkley donation.

Your vote will enable me to continue working for the members of the CA and croquet in general.

Dr. Tim King

Dr. King is proposed by Mr. W.H Arliss and seconded by Mrs P Duke-Cox

Dr King was a garden croquet player from a young age but only discovered the real depth of the sport when he joined Ashby Croquet Club in 2000, having returned from living abroad for eight years (The Netherlands and then Japan). Since then he has grown as a player (at club, Federation and national level) and administrator (committee member

LETTERS

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Coming back to the selection events, I wonder how many players participating in them this year are doing so for the first time? Out of 40+ players, my guess is no more than one or two.

I have absolutely no idea how to deal with the issue, but recognising it as a problem (if, indeed, it is one) must be the first step. Perhaps gathering some statistics on championship entries over a five year-period would be useful, allowing for some analysis over a longer time-period to see if there really is a problem. I fear that the answer is yes, but would be delighted to be proved wrong.

Nick Parish

PRESCOTT: CROQUET’S GREATEST FRIEND

Liz Williams, CA Marketing Committee

‘Gunfight at the Croquet Corral!’ screamed *The Sun* headline on the 7 July 2006. This is not anything to do with how members of the CA play the game but a comment on John Prescott’s trip to a tycoon’s ranch in Texas in the continuing saga of Deputy Prime Minister and croquet.

The story first broke on Sunday 28 May 2006 in the *Mail on Sunday* whose long lenses had spied Prezzy playing

croquet at Dorneywood when he was supposed to running the country in the Prime Minister’s absence. It was difficult to tell from the resulting avalanche of press coverage whether his crime was playing when he should have working or playing what the *Mail* described as an ‘effete toffs’ game. From the furore, it appeared to be a bit of both, perhaps erring more towards the sin of a Labour man playing this toffs’ sport. Whatever it was, it resulted in a massive increase in croquet coverage in the media.

The broadsheets gave space to the game in the days that followed with varying degrees of accuracy, and nearly all stating that the game was vicious and that balls ended up in the shrubbery. The honourable exception was the Independent, who produced a good, thoughtful article, with a good diagram of the layout of a lawn. At least no-one suggested the game was played with flamingos and hedgehogs.

There was also a requirement for comments from players of the game, and the resulting media coverage was huge. Richard Hilditch provided an interview for Radio 5 Live, Bill Arliss also did interviews for the radio, and Klim Seabright, CA Secretary, did at least five interviews for local BBC radio stations including Gloucestershire, Cornwall and Somerset. Patricia Duke-Cox and Liz Wilson gave interviews to Radios Lincolnshire and Lancashire respectively. Meanwhile in Scotland, Fergus McInnes, Ian Wright and Evelyn McKenzie were interviewed on Good Morning Scotland (BBC). Over in

Wales, Jim Clancy was interviewed by BBC Radio Wales and the *Western Mail*, and Chris Williams took part in a BBC Radio Wales Sunday morning programme, “Something Else”. The final coup de grace was that ‘Have I got News for You’ on BBC television featured *The Croquet Gazette*, as the guest publication with some interesting headlines about camping at Budleigh Salterton being used.

The effect didn’t just end there: the CA website went from around 8,000 hits per day to 19,000 on 31st May, Asda reported a 300 per cent rise in the sale of croquet sets, but a Commons motion by the Liberal Democrats praising croquet was banned as this would mock John Prescott.

Since then, the press has used croquet a good deal: coverage of the Opens was fairly good considering the final took place on the same day as the Wimbledon Mens’ Final and the football World Cup final. Two good, substantial articles in *The Times* and *The Guardian* appeared, with results being printed regularly in the *Daily Telegraph*. The Wales V Canada match played in June also received good coverage with five minutes on the BBC TV Wales Friday evening sports programme.

John Prescott was not the only politician with a link with croquet this summer: David Cameron opened the Eynsham Croquet club on 1 May 2006, but presciently decided not to be photographed holding a croquet mallet. Perhaps he knew something we didn’t.....

TOURNAMENT ROUND-UP

Patrick Swales (Hurlingham) won the Tyneside Midweek handicap tournament.

Report by Derek Watts

In a closely fought contest, 8 players, pacing themselves in sultry conditions, managed to provide some entertaining croquet.

The early leaders were David Turner (Tyneside) and David Millener (Belsay Hall) but by persistent play from Patrick and Roger Staples (Middlesbrough) the leaders were gradually hauled in. Roger collecting a bronze and then silver medal in his match against David Appleton gave him the impetus which rewarded him with the runner up place. David Millener, playing his first CA tournament also qualified for a bronze medal. Patrick was well pleased with his achievement considering his last visit to Tyneside when he lost all his games!

The event was ably managed by Derek Trotman and lunches & teas were tastfully served by Sheila Watts and her ladies in waiting.



Photo showing the players: L to R, Patrick Swales (Hurlingham), David Millener (Belsay Hall), Nigel Graves (Surbiton), David Turner (Tyneside), Derek Trotman (Manager), Roger Staples (Middlesbrough), Phil Errington (Belsay Hall), Tony Whateley (Glasgow) and David Appleton (Tyneside).

The Croquet Association

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Basic Laws of Association and Golf Croquet	£2.00
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Croquet - The Skills of the Game by Bill Lamb	£10.00
Croquet by John Solomon	£9.00
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Croquet: Error Correction by John Riches	£7.00
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Croquet: The Mental Approach by John Riches	£9.00
Croquet: Lessons in Tactics by John Riches	£9.00
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VIDEOS

Imported from Australia, these videos were made by Kevin Brereton in the 1990's.

Single ball strokes (30min)	£12.00
Croquet Strokes (30min)	£12.00
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Tactics part 3 - Peeling (90 mins)	£16.00
Using Bisques (30 mins)	£12.00
Sports Sciences & Croquet (30 min)	£12.00

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CLUB EQUIPMENT

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Corner flags, yardline markers, pegs, clips, gauges.

since 2001 and currently Vice-Chair of Ashby and a member of the CA Golf Croquet Committee since 2005). He enjoys both Association and Golf Croquet.

The highlight of his playing career to date was to represent England at the 2006 World Golf Croquet Championships in New Zealand but he has also enjoyed two national victories in Golf Croquet doubles and won both Association Croquet and Golf Croquet titles in Norway in 2005. Beyond playing, Tim has developed a reputation for photography and report writing of croquet tournaments.

Outside the sport of croquet, he has a Japanese wife and three young children, is Church Warden of St. Editha's Tamworth and is a professional engineer and Chartered Member of the British Computer Society, with responsibility for development of international standards.

He has a skill set that includes project management, facilitation and communication.

Tim believes in consulting widely and working to find approaches that build on the collected contributions of the diverse individuals who participate in croquet. Harmony is particularly important in an amateur, minority sport, which is more important than any one ego. He enjoys discovering and exploring the opinions of everyone from the very beginner to the top international.

While embracing appropriate innovation for appropriate benefits, Tim also believes in nurturing the unique culture and format of croquet to allow all ages, both sexes and any ability to compete on the same court and gain personal enjoyment.

Mr DW Trotman

Over the next few years I am sure Council will be involved in some major problems. Ones that come quickly to mind are, the revision of the CA structure to meet the requirements of the rapidly growing Golf Croquet Game, ways of reducing the age profile of the membership and how our sport can survive if the watering ban in the South of England becomes a semi-permanent feature of our summers.

Should I be re-elected, I believe that the knowledge and experience I have gained in CA matters over the 14 years I have served on Council will be of great assistance at future meetings. During those 14 years I have witnessed some major changes in both the administrative structure of the CA and expansion of the game at international level and also the development of Golf Croquet as a serious competitive game. I have also had the honour, during this time, of chairing both the Development Committee and the Tournament committee and at various other times I have also been a member of the following committees: Management; Finance and General Purposes; International; Golf Croquet and Publicity.

Mr RG Strover

Mr. Strover is proposed by Ms J Blake and seconded by Mr DS Old

I was born in 1941 and brought up in an Essex Rectory. The whole family played croquet on the lawn. My grandmother had played in the Essex and Suffolk tournaments before the First World War. I have some wonderful photos of her in long dress and feathered hat, mallet in hand. She has labelled one such photo "The nerve game", nothing much has changed.

I was educated at The Dragon School, Oxford and Marlborough, before starting articles as a Chartered Accountant in the city. After qualifying I was one of the early computer audit specialists and at 28 became a partner in the firm that through mergers is now Price Waterhouse Coopers. I later specialised in mergers and acquisitions. My clients were mainly multinationals and I visited most parts of the world. I was on the council of The Institute of Chartered Accountants, chairing the technical committee and serving on the Disciplinary Committee before retiring in 1995. I then did an Open University degree in psychology.

As an adult I have played various sports, hockey, tennis, squash, golf and sailing, but only started playing croquet seriously in 2004. I learned the rules of golf croquet by refereeing at the World Championships at Compton that year. In September that year I played in my first open tournament, the Yorkshire Open at Ripon and managed to reach the semi-finals. After some limited success in 2005 I was lucky enough to be

awarded a wild card to play in the World Golf Croquet Championships in New Zealand this year and came 21st. I have played in both the Italian and Egyptian Opens; as well as playing in Australia and Bermuda.

I am on the Committee of Colchester and Sudbury Croquet Clubs as well as various charity and church committees.

Mr BPE Fisk

I have been on Council for 3 years; and am currently chairman of coaching committee and also serve on handicap, tournament, publishing and management committee. I am a grade 2 coach, a referee, a CA handicapper and regularly play in and manage CA tournaments. I am a member of three croquet clubs, Littleton (near Winchester), Hamptworth (near Salisbury), and Cheltenham.

I serve on the Littleton committee as Club Coach and Handicapper. I am also the Handicapping Officer for the Southern Federation. I have been playing croquet regularly for about ten years in which time my handicap has steadily descended from 16 to 0.5. Outside of croquet I am employed as a software development manager by a large computer company. If re-elected I plan to stay on the same committees and continue to try to improve coaching.

Why not escape the cold this winter and join us in sunny SOUTH AFRICA?

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cbej@btinternet.com
and from end October in South Africa on
002711 789 5583 – cbej@lantic.net.

Letters

continued from page 5

Bi-polar croquet and the AHS revisited

This title refers to the excellent article written by Geoffrey Cuttle in Issue 283. The problems he mentions there are now even more prevalent and can be summarised by the following three facts.

1. Generally the handicap game is no longer attractive to the A class player.
2. Players lose more games when giving bisques than when they receive them.
3. Although honours appear even when considering the number of games won or lost overall, the imbalance of [2] above causes the polarisation.

Since people who retire from playing competitive croquet remove more points on average from the AHS than the number of points beginners add to the system, we have an AHS that is gradually and inexorably being starved of points while the number of players remains constant. Thus, the average number of points per player decreases over the years and, for the reason of arithmetic and not because play is deteriorating, handicaps increase. There is now a greater spread of handicaps; so when we play handicap

games the differences between handicaps are too high.

The remedy: I like Geoffrey Cuttle's solution. For competitive games, players giving bisques (win or lose) should adjust their card according to the sliding scale of points used in level play while those not giving bisques (including players of the same handicap playing each other) should adjust their card as now by adding or deducting 10 points. This means that if higher handicap players win more often [like now] the system points will increase whereas should lower handicap people win more often the system points will decrease. This will ensure an AHS that is self-adjusting and any bias will be shortlived.

Please, Handicap Committee it is time to make a change.

Geoff Strutt

7-0 Handicap Match Results

Two years ago Bristol lost a home Longman Cup match 0-7, which set me thinking about handicap match statistics, and to conclude that the chances of this score were something like 400 to one against. When I summarised my findings in a short report in the Gazette (Dec. 2004, No. 294, p 14), it got a heated response from members of the club responsible, whom I tried to pacify by the assurance that no criticism was aimed at them. This was indeed true then, but earlier this month we played the same club again in the Longman, and lost by exactly the same score: no doubt our opponents played well, but this seems to be pushing luck too far, and this time my feelings are different.

On looking at Longman results from 2004 onwards, I was surprised to find that the club which administered two whitewashes to Bristol also had a third, and these out of a total of only 8 matches: their overall results include two close wins, and even a loss, but three 7-0 wins and also two by 6-1, is an astonishingly high proportion of extreme scores. The basic premise of handicapping is that off the right handicap, each player in a game has an even chance of winning; in which case the probability of three 7-0 wins from eight matches is only about one in ten thousand, or to put it another way, a once in 25,000 years outcome. Of course, very unlikely results do occur, but when they do, it is a good idea to reconsider the initial premise, i.e. that the players were correctly bisqued, and to wonder if the playing field was really level. A much more likely reason than chance for

these extreme wins, over four different clubs including Bristol, all of them long established and widely experienced in competition standards of play, is that the club concerned had got its handicapping badly wrong.

A 7-0 win in a handicap match is not a reason for pride or complacency; it really signals a major mismatch, and should cause a club to examine its standards. Players who play much better than their handicap are called 'bandits', and special arrangements to deal with them have been devised by the CA. Similarly teams who play much better than their handicaps (perhaps we should call them 'blueberries') need some sort of sanction applied to them: perhaps the CA should reward teams which win Longman matches 7-0 by imposing a mandatory reduction of, say, 2 bisques per member. In the real world these things are trivial, perhaps, but the CA needs to keep its house in order, and not allow its National competitions to become devalued.

More debate welcome

I welcome the editorial which asks for open and public debate on the way forward for Golf and Association Croquet. For this to happen, the dissemination of information to all interested parties is of supreme importance, and for croquet this does not seem to be. In the game of cricket there used to be 'gentlemen and players, with each category having distinct rights and privileges. It was done away with years ago but for croquet it seems 'gentlemen and players' image persists. The 'gentlemen' are those who enter tournaments and are individual members of the CA. They receive the Gazette and other publications. The 'Players', of whom I am one, are the affiliated members who play lots of croquet but receive nothing at all from the CA. (I personally see the publications because my son is an individual member) Affiliated clubs pay a tiny annual sum per affiliated member to the CA.

I wonder if the CA Council had ever considered raising this fee considerably so that each member receives their own personal copy of the Gazette. Another option might dispense with the two categories of membership altogether and make everyone an affiliated member. Without first-class dissemination of information, the debate that the Editor encourages cannot even begin. Not only that, all the usefull 'News and Information', 'Chairman's Column', Coaching articles etc never reach the

majority of people who play the game. In addition, the editor might receive more copy, and the advertisers would surely welcome a larger circulation which in turn might attract more of them, so reducing production costs. There are so many advantages in making the Gazette more widely distributed to croquet players that I think this should be part of the debate too. With computers the opportunity to vastly increase the numbers of names on the data base is achievable.

Richard Mills

Decline in the Eights?

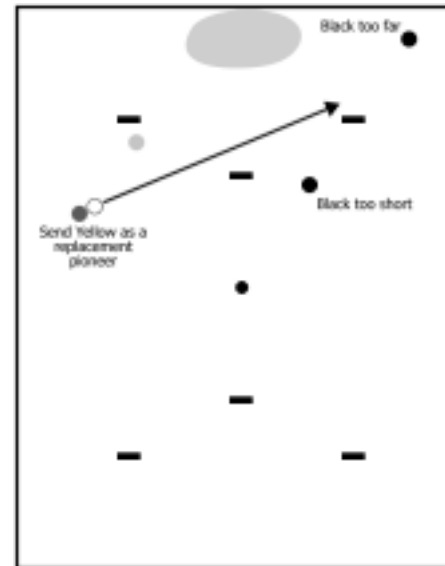
There has been some comment about the decline in popularity of the selection events this year. I wonder if this is specific to the Eights (where the venues of Sidmouth, Hunstanton and Jersey may have put a few players off), or if there is a wider decline in Championship play? Golf croquet seems fairly vibrant, but I am not sure if the same can be said for the association game. Previously over-subscribed tournaments such as the Northern Championships have advertised vacancies, and the turnout in others, notably the Eastern Championships and the Men's & Women's, have been well below what they were last year. While I'm quoting selectively, and many tournaments haven't suffered a decline, I'm not aware of any whose turnout has substantially *increased* this year (with the exception of the Coles, which was due to the overflow from the Westerns and therefore a special case).

A couple of players have emigrated to NZ and another couple are having a year off, but in a healthy sport the disappearance of four players shouldn't make a huge difference. The decline may be due to a lack of new players coming through to the top of the game. When I raised this point to others, the names of Death, Burrow, Tudor, Kirby and Evans, as well as Wicks (who is a new player in anyone's book) were suggested to me. The first four of those players all first reached an index/grade of 2300 or above (which currently equates roughly to getting into the UK top 40) between 1997 and 2001. It may be indicative of the problem that we think of those as being up-and-coming, new players, when, other than Evans and Wicks, they have all been up there for between 5 and 9 years, making them in reality experienced players.

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Hit the pivot ball, and send it to Hoop 3. Straightaway, you're back on track. The ball you'd planned to use as your pioneer has become your pivot, and vice versa. You're not 100% in the clear yet – after Hoop 2 you've got to get a ball down to Hoop 4, but we'll discuss some options in a moment. Cross your fingers, and hope you can get a rush on Red towards the shaded area.

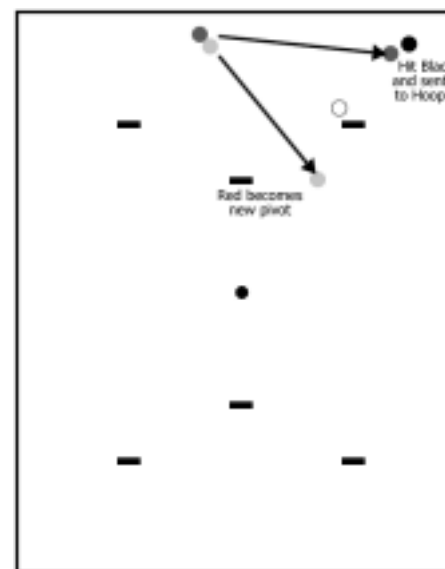


Now suppose you've overhit your pioneer (Black) to Hoop 3. You're faced with a nasty roll approach to the hoop from somewhere near the corner. The solution's the same – when you've a pioneer you don't like, send your pivot ball to replace it. This time, though, you need a couple more shots to get things back into shape.

The problem is that there's a ball beyond the hoop which needs bringing back in. What you want to achieve is a ball at Hoop 4 (the new pioneer), a ball somewhere in front of you and vaguely near Hoop 6 (the pivot), and your ball and one other at Hoop 3. How you set this up depends on how close to the corner the Black is.

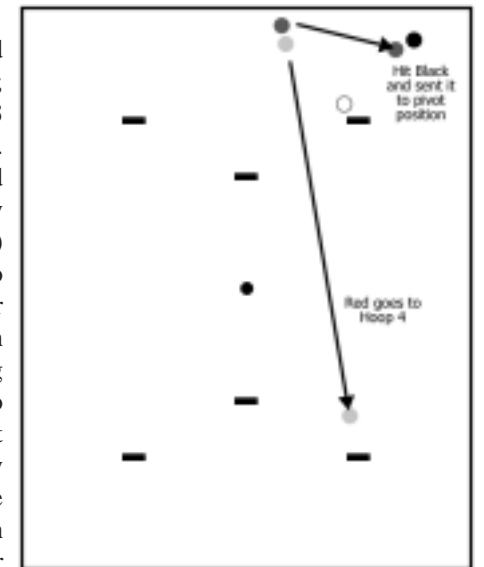
Come through Hoop 2 with Red, and try to get a rush to somewhere a bit closer (ideally in the shaded area). It's no disaster if you don't get a productive rush, but you'll have a slightly harder croquet stroke to follow. Whatever happens, you've now got a choice. Here are your options:

1) Red = pivot; Black = Hoop 4 ball; Yellow = Hoop 3 ball. Roll Red towards pivot position, going to Black. Send Black to Hoop 4 with a big straight stop shot. Make Hoop 3 off Yellow.

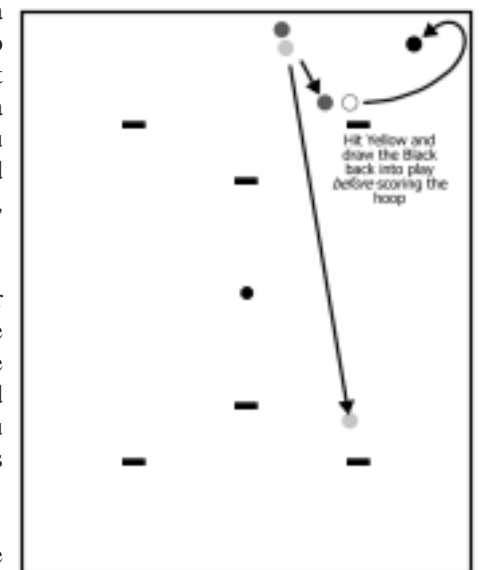


2) Red = Hoop 4 ball; Black = pivot; Yellow = Hoop 3 ball. Stop shot Red to Hoop 4, ending near Black (don't try this unless you're starting from the right position, or you don't mind playing an eight-yard roquet mid-turn!). Black becomes the pivot with an easy little shot and you're back on track.

3 Red = Hoop 4 ball; Black = Hoop 3 ball; Yellow = pivot. (Difficult, and recommended only as a last resort) Stop shot Red to Hoop 4, ending near Yellow. You're in danger of leaving Black behind, so you need to bring it back into play by using it to make the hoop. Either rush Yellow to the far side of Black, then stuff it back towards the pivot position, or leave it where it is, and take off to the far side of Black. Either way, you need to land short of Black, ready to rush it to Hoop 3.



4 Use a bisque. Send Red to Hoop 4, shoot at Black, miss, take a bisque. Now you can hit Black, and send it into play, going to Yellow.



Whichever option you take depends on where the balls lie, and how much you fancy your chances with each shot.

Repeat for the next hoop

You've just improved a bad situation, and made a difficult Hoop 3 seem less of an obstacle. Ideally, you'll have salvaged the situation, and regained perfect control with no problems. Ideally.

In reality, you've probably had to mess around with the positions of the other balls, and you'll have put them back in nearly, but not exactly, the right positions. Don't worry, it's not a disaster. At the very least, you've put off having to take a bisque until a hoop later. But prepare yourself for what you might find once you're through Hoop 3. Everything could be fine: pioneer a foot in front of Hoop 4, and pivot nicely placed in front of you. On the other hand, there could be a big cluttered mess of balls all over the place. Just wait right there, and we'll sort out the problem in the next lesson.