

Croquet Report for 2016 AGM

Regular winter play on the grass tennis courts enabled a few hardy members to maximise the value of their annual subscriptions and with the invitation to our winter lunch meeting the section was able to remain in touch with its members throughout the ostensibly close season. A few other clubs in our (SCF) region manage to play during the winter with obvious advantages and we are grateful for Ryde's dual-use policy which facilitates this at the Club. Of course weather is the controlling factor and recent mild but wet winter periods can require suspension of play to enable the lawn to recover.

An early start to regular play was possible this year and in particular involving several new recruits who had responded to various advertisements including the council's "Isle be Active" scheme. Beginners' coaching remains a somewhat piecemeal affair and we are still working on a more effective and prudent use of our limited resources. Four members attended a coaches' course in March enabling us to achieve a final total of some 20 newcomers who received a basic introduction to the game. Half of these we were able to recruit to the reduced croquet first-year club membership option. Some existing members also took the opportunity of free pre-mix-in coaching sessions given by various senior players during the summer on requested aspects of the game. It is hoped that we can develop this more widely to cater for the widest ability range amongst our membership and encourage them to practise their skills outside of organised club time.

Corporate "play and eat" events continue to be very popular with both existing and new groups despite a slight increase in charges. Along with tournament catering this is by far our major source of income and as such relies heavily on a small dedicated team of caterers and organisers to succeed. We welcome offers of help, no experience needed but willingness to learn and a sense of humour essential!

The year's sporting story was more one of steady individual progress rather than outstanding national prestige. Ongoing changes approved by the CA will take a year or two before most of us are affected although for the first time in recent years we were temporarily denied the opportunity of hosting a national CA tournament. This did not stop two of our players reaching the All England Handicap GC final at Colchester and fully upholding Ryde's good record in this event. Our three open tournaments were held as usual in May (GC) June (AC) and July (GC) and again Ryde names appeared among the trophy winners on every occasion. We have a more stable diary structure for these annual competitions now but need to continue tinkering with the detail in order to maximise interest and income. Nothing stays the same for very long it seems.

As team players we continue to offer a force to reckon with both in our own region and wider afield. Half of the Hampshire county GC team continues to be composed of Ryde players and 5 match wins out of 11 at the Inter-Counties was another very pleasing result at the top level. The Southern Challenge weekend at Southwick is a great team-bonding opportunity for us (but a logistical nightmare) and a splendid chance to expose players to something a little more truly challenging than the local leagues. We don't expect to win but we do know that we can compete very successfully at this level. Next season somebody has suggested a second entry in this event (a double nightmare, but watch this space!).

At local level the Solstice Challenge rules have gradually become more restrictive but notwithstanding, after a one year absence another Ryde pair was added to the long list of home winners in this event. It may not be viable for us to host this event but we certainly know how to host the trophy, if only there were more room in the cabinet! Another piece of silverware looking for a home is the SCF GC doubles trophy awarded once more to Ryde after an undefeated league season. Not to be outdone our small band of AC players look to have qualified once more to play in the Secretary's Shield national competition for this coming season.

The remaining SCF leagues offered mixed results for Ryde teams (7 wins out of 11) but we continue to encourage less experienced members to take part at an appropriate level; first time competition away from the Island can be quite illuminating.

Another area offering competitive experience is our growing programme of friendly matches. This year we hosted a newly formed club, Lodsworth, who were looking to spread their wings. A large contingent descended on us from West Sussex over two days and the fine June weather contributed to a very successful experience for all concerned. A repeat visit is already being planned as is another new friendly fixture with Rother Valley, also Sussex based. Clubs such as these with little experience and inferior facilities to ours benefit greatly from these opportunities and Ryde are pleased to be able to contribute in this way to the growth of the game as a whole.

As usual the hard work of many volunteers lies behind the success or otherwise of the events in this report and our gratitude to them is easily overlooked. A big thank you then to all concerned with catering, managing, mowing, gardening, barrowing, painting, pruning, sweeping, swishing, watering, white-lining, hoop moving, you name it.....; and not forgetting the member who spent much of his winter transforming the croquet store shed into something not to be missed and from which everyone of us will undoubtedly benefit.