

Croquet Report for 2017

The diary for 2017 retained the more traditional pattern of recent years with all of our established events running at familiar times and places. An eye on the unpredictable nature of the Island's festival dates is always a key factor in our planning where mainland involvement is critical. Whilst the loss of Bestival was a big plus for hosting the CA in September we now have to accommodate the Pop Festival which has moved to our regular Isle of Wight Championship dates in June next year.

Tradition though does not need to stand in the way of innovation and as well as the Club's magnificent refurbishment scheme from which we can all benefit the croquet section organised their own little bit of building history. Improver's Week at the end of April was designed for members to build on their skills at whatever level by making full use of the available knowledge and experience within the section. All regular activity was put on hold during the whole week to enable a daily afternoon programme of desirable or requested croquet topics to be led by senior players, and with most repeated during the week to enable maximum participation. Members, from raw beginners to team players alike, all know their own shortcomings and the particular opportunity to make some positive improvement in their understanding and skill was widely welcomed. Topics as diverse as lawn maintenance, one-ball AC and the complexities of the wrong-ball GC law were all covered with the emphasis always on practical work on the court wherever possible. Never before was the chance to get more out of our game so easily available and we plan to repeat the exercise next year.

In recent years Ryde have tried to support many of the CA's initiatives and the developing GC scheme of A, B (and soon to come C) level series tournaments based on handicap groups is one that we have taken fully on-board. Our one day May tournament was run as a B-level and attracted a balanced field of home players and visitors. Ryde took the first three places but opted not to make the long haul to Liverpool for the final. Our extended grasp on the annual Centenary Cup (A-level tournament) at last came to an end; although not involved in the Final Ryde players were able to hold on to 3rd and 4th places. We continue to attract a competitive interest in our open AC tournament with both handicap and advanced events this year also won by mainlanders. Positive and encouraging feedback from many of our visitors reflected particularly the hard work put in on behalf of the buildings and social committees to upgrade our clubhouse and catering experience. Combined with the top quality lawns this jewel of a facility is something to be proud of but should never be taken for granted.

League successes this year were unexceptional but the experiment with two GC handicap teams enabled more members to gain valuable match experience and will be repeated for the coming season. Our AC stalwarts, now requiring 100% availability in order to raise a team, continued to hold their own for a second season without defeat; unfortunately achieving only a mid-table league placing because most matches were drawn. We continue to promote AC as best we can but 'you pays your money and takes your choice' is a maxim that's hard to argue with.

Our, now traditional, playing strengths were again to the fore this season. Three All-England GC semi-finalists and one finalist maintained our splendid record in this national singles competition. We'll also find it hard to better the Solstice doubles result this year with both Ryde teams fighting out a 7-6 score line in the final at Hamptworth. We repeated last season's

initiative by again taking two teams to different venues over the same weekend to compete in the Southern Challenge. Whilst holding our own in both divisions this event is much more about team bonding and the benefits and enjoyment arising from friendly competition.

A typical season is rarely without its contrasts. Compare say an arduous day trip to distant High Wycombe (where?) only to find the lawns fit for paddling ducks rather than croquet, with a friendly invitation to play on the hallowed lawns of the All England Club at you know where. Is this the first time that *any* RLTC member has played at Wimbledon we wonder? As well as both AC and GC competition our teams were served lunch in the Rolex dining room and given a conducted tour of this national icon.

Off the lawns we strive to ensure that players who wish to engage competitively are assigned appropriate handicaps and this year we introduced a modified GC handicap card which will hopefully make that task a little easier. A severe shortage of qualified (GC) referees prompted a series of early season in-house seminars for interested players and as a result two members passed the exam and several more now have a much better understanding of the laws. After several years of planning the CA introduced their new membership scheme in October and when fully implemented the contribution to our sport of its governing body should become much more apparent and appreciated by all. It is likely that our membership rate of nearly 90% will put Ryde amongst the most supportive clubs in the country.

Ryde rightly remains high on the list of attractive venues for CA invitation events and we were chosen this year to host the Spencer Ell (the third eight national AC players) 5 day competition in September. Our improved facilities were well up to the task come rain or shine and players were again delighted with their reception and our ability to adapt to their requirements. It has to be said that the behind the scenes work involved in putting these big events together successfully is critically dependent on the willingness of volunteers to go the extra mile. We are indebted and extremely grateful to all those who have helped in whatever capacity with this and all money-raising functions that we endeavour to provide. It is not only the headline grabbing events that make our club what it is. Our members regularly help with introducing croquet to juniors, teaching beginners how to hold a mallet and hit a ball, organising corporate evenings, managing internal competitions and mix-in rotas, and of course the annual round of lawn preparation and maintenance, irrigation and board painting. The list is almost endless so please let us know how you are able to help spread the future workload as widely as possible. Your club would not survive without this involvement.