

Croquet Report for 2018

Notably a year in which the weather played a key role in many of our activities; from the early season saturation to the summer drought, water was never in the right place at the right time.

An unusually wet March and stretching well into April meant that a series of "Introduction to Croquet" meetings were held either in the clubhouse or on the least muddy patch of unmarked lawn that we could find. It was not until late April, just in time for Improvers' Week, that the main lawns could be marked out and set up for play. Despite these setbacks, following our Introductory Courses which attracted over twenty interested newcomers including several club tennis members, we increased our membership by ten.

We modelled Improvers' Week for our own members on last year's event and set up a comprehensive range of topics aimed at improving skills and knowledge of the game for all abilities. All of the above initiatives are highly resource dependent on manpower and experience and the committee are looking at ways to try and channel our limited skills more efficiently. Many club members are surprised to learn that croquet has no professional coaching structure at any level.

On both the national and local circuits Ryde croquet remains a competitive and prominent club and now has full representation on the Southern Croquet committee, re-establishing a link held briefly some years ago by the late Richard Harris. The vast majority of our members have now joined the CA either as premium members with tournament and other privileges or as standard members. All CA members are entitled to receive a copy of the Croquet Gazette at this time.

The season's tournament calendar has become more settled in recent years with our own four CA events now fixed in place as best as we can but always having to allow for an annoyingly volatile pop festival date. This year we were not asked to host a CA selection tournament, the competition is fierce and we do get our fair share, but it has become clear, looking ahead, that the Island's annual bank holiday scooter rally is another date which does us no favours in this respect. In exchange though, we were invited to take part in the launch of the national GC C-level series competition aimed at players who had no previous tournament experience.

These open tournaments themselves are attracting increasing numbers of entries, especially for the three Golf competitions. Much of this is almost certainly due to our recent participation in the CA's online booking system with the A-level July competition being oversubscribed by early March. As well as managing entries for us the system deals efficiently with payments both to ourselves and to the CA. It is always nice to do well in our own open competitions but Ryde's clean sweep of all three GC events by three different members was unprecedented, well deserved and no foregone conclusion.

Our annual participation in the GC All England Handicap failed for once to produce a national finalist but was well compensated for by an inaugural national C-level Series 3rd place at Nottingham and a repeat one-two in the Southern Federation Solstice doubles final at Hamptworth. The Southern Challenge team event is a demanding two-

day competition held at Southwick and Surbiton over the same weekend. Ryde took two teams of six and came back with a best ever 2nd place in both divisions. Two of our players were selected for the Hampshire team in division 1 of this year's GC inter-counties competition – the third went on holiday!

We again fielded three golf and one association team in the Southern leagues, the latter yet again defying the odds by winning their division with only five players, but unfortunately losing the subsequent league play-off. Several friendly fixtures are now becoming established and along with in-house tournaments and block games they provide an ideal opportunity for improvers to try their hand at more competitive play. Despite much head scratching and arm twisting on the committee's behalf GC remains the most popular game by a long way, a fact which entirely reflects the national mood. The July drought was not much fun for the lawns with extensive irrigation needed just to retain some semblance of grass but providing ideal conditions for dry patch to make itself clearly visible. Treatment for this is now a top priority and much investigation by the grounds' maintenance team will hopefully bear fruit in the coming season. The recommended use of an air machine to help reduce compaction has already been implemented as part of the winter programme.

At least the summer weather provided added incentive to join our regular mix-ins and on several afternoons, player numbers exceeded the lawn capacity giving the organisers an unexpected headache! The sunshine was a great attraction too for the corporate cream teas brigade and our decision to drop suppers in their favour helped us to a profit of nearly £1500 on these events alone. Some two dozen of our croquet members contributed a great many voluntary hours in order to run this corporate programme for which we thank them, and ask whoever can help in any way to please join us again next year. Without this commitment on the lawns and behind the scenes our club would not look anything like you see today.