



newsletter

stop press...stop press CLUB FINALS DAY POSTPONED

The finals day for the internal club competitions has been postponed until **Thursday 16 September**, starting no later than **4.30pm**. As this is the day before our tournament there will be a lot of work to do beforehand, such as hoop setting, lawn marking and loo erection. If you are free during the afternoon and can help please ring John Wheeler (01525 860134). We would obviously like to see as many spectators as possible for the finals, so please come along, bring any friends who might be interested, cheer on your favourites as they battle for the silverware, and join the winners and losers in the Star & Garter afterwards as they relive the triumphs and disasters. The finalists are:

Steel Cup: Jon Watson and Howard Bottomley

Archer Cup: George Collin and either Peter Berry or John Bevington

De Grey Plate: Gordon Sampson and Peter Newman

The Ashwell Cup, our heat for the All England Handicap, has already been won by John Bevington. John and George Collin will be representing the club in the area final to be held at Wrest Park, and you can read how they got on later in this newsletter.

Inter Counties Golf Croquet 15 August

The wet weather which had been predicted for the weekend held off, and there was plenty of sunshine. Bill Arliss arrived early with his gazebo, and John Bevington and John Wheeler served coffee and biscuits.



Manager Don Beck (with shades, facing camera at centre) addresses the players before the start while John Wheeler looks on.

There were six teams from Essex, Kent, Oxfordshire, Sussex, Tyne & Wear and Yorkshire. Play started at 10

o'clock and consisted of five rounds of two singles and one doubles, played to 13 points and time-limited to 45 minutes for singles (double-banked on lawns 1, 3 and 5) and 50 minutes for the doubles on the other lawns.

As only six counties were playing instead of the eight that had been expected the event was all over by 4 o'clock and won by Kent, whereupon Bill dismantled his gazebo and drove off, leaving the rest of his kit behind. One of these days someone will leave with more items than they came with.



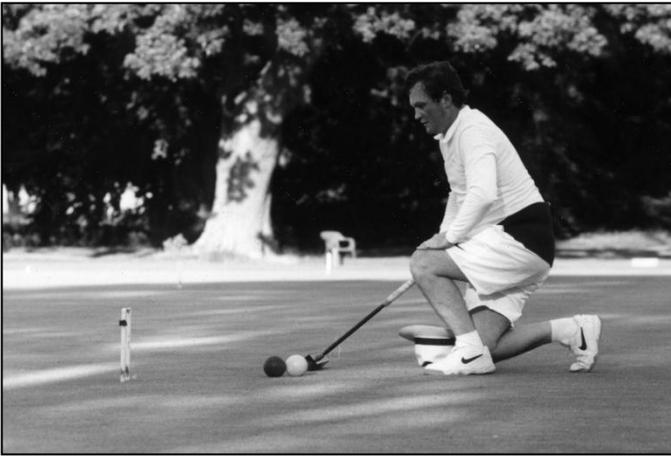
Oxford and Sussex battling it out in the doubles. In the background, Essex and Kent contest hoop 4. Note the bismques used to mark the halfway points (see the WCF rules for details).

Advanced tournament 21-22 August

Report by John Bevington, photos by George Collin

Maybe there is only a certain amount of confidence, chutzpah, hwyl or whatever else you wish to call it that one can draw on during the course of a season. Suffice to say that in the course of the first game, as the dew lay heavy on the ground so that the line of every missed shot was there for all to see, your reporter saw the chances of consolidating his hard-earned reduction to 2½ fading fast. Nothing worked. Lamentable lines and lengths in splits. Approaches that left knee-trembling six-footers or the "sod it, where shall I put it?" shot. Tactical decisions that always turned out to be the wrong ones. Frustration and mild panic in equal measure. Only a game? Hah!

But the sun shone, and every so often there would occur the incident that every reporter dreams of. Let's face it, croquet is usually less than dramatic to watch, and rarely that exciting in print. Hats off, then, to Mike Percival, who was attempting some kind of cut rush near the west boundary on lawn 3. There was a small gallery sitting in attendance, and he thoughtfully suggested that they might like to consider their ankles. Several pairs of legs were raised in unison and anticipation, the shot was played, and a nearby mug, thankfully empty, was comprehensively shattered.



The Triple Appeal. Manager Jon Watson, genuflecting before the altar of 4-back, offers up a quick prayer.

Conditions weren't easy. The hoops were tight (in some cases a 5p piece was only a sliding fit) and the recent rain had plumped up the lawns just enough for the natural contours to come into play, so long take-offs would sometimes start to curl round as the pace slowed, often ending on the wrong side of the target, or (worse) in the jaws, or (even worse) off the lawn altogether. We moaned. Occasionally we (sotto voce) swore. Sometimes we even said "Hard luck!", which, with an opponent of recent acquaintance and depending on the intonation, is as about as close to sledging as one decently dare go.



Rod Ashwell pauses at hoop 5. We suspect that he has just realised that he is about to need the services of a referee.

While on this topic, let me raise a point regarding outplayer psychology. I know of players who, when watching their opponent about to run a tricky hoop, are heard to mutter various imprecations which could not be said to favour the person concerned's chances in the endeavour. Occasionally their prayers are answered, but often they are not. It seems to me that this attitude does nothing more than reinforce a fear of failure in the person willing the error and is therefore totally counter-productive. Far better, it would seem, to wish one's opponent well at every opportunity (the do as you would be done by principle), then should there be a misplay you can step in and take advantage with a clear (sporting) conscience. But what do others think?

The 24 competitors were made up of eight Wrest Parkers, the usual suspects from Letchworth and Northampton, and a combination of regular visitors from near and far. Graham Dodd came up from Sidmouth and departed with three wins. Kevin Wells, a past Wrest

Park member, had travelled over from the Isle of Man and had a good win against David Lilly, who himself had two triples in his three wins, the only ones of the weekend. During his game with John Gibbons (who has come down from 9 to 3½ since winning the All Englan Handicap at Wrest Park last year) Graham Bond was to be seen earnestly reading Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, but he was unable to find a winning strategy.

We ended with a five-way tie, which was resolved with a shoot-out at the peg from the side boundary, each player having four shots. This always has the potential for deep embarrassment with the crowd looking on, as missing by a foot is the equivalent of missing the goal altogether. Styles varied from Peter Stansfield's swing, swing together to John Wheeler's almost casual-looking shoot on sight, but in the end Nick Evans' studied simplicity and smoothness succeeded. On a statistical note, there were five hits out of 20, a 25% success rate. Par for the course?

Match results

Mary Rose semi-final vs Northampton (home)

28 August

Won 6-1

Wrest Park	H'cap	Northampton	H'cap	WP score
Rod Ashwell	2	Peter Stansfield	2½	+6
John Wheeler	2½	Norman Hicks	3½	
George Collin	2½	Derek Humphrey	3½	+21
John Bevington	2½	Philip Shaw	4	+22
Rod Ashwell	2	Peter Stansfield	2½	+13
John Wheeler	2½	Philip Shaw	4	+4
George Collin	2½	Norman Hicks	3½	-16
John Bevington	2½	Derek Humphrey	3½	+9

A great win saw us through to the final for the second year in succession, but the scoreline was a trifle flattering. In the morning, as the sun blazed down, John was presented with some golden opportunities by Philip and took full advantage for a quick win. George then completed his win over Derek by pegging out one ball after yet another double peel and then hitting the peg square on at the first opportunity. The doubles ebbed and flowed for four hours until Rod hit the peg 3/2 from a distance, so we were 3-0 up at lunch.

John then sealed it with a win against Derek, which was celebrated with a burst of applause and sighs of relief. George lost to Norman, Rod finally saw off Peter Stansfield, and John and Philip did their best to give each other the game until Philip stuck in penultimate to give John the chance he needed. The final, against either Southwick or Cheltenham, is at Cheltenham on October 2. Supporters will of course be welcome.

All England Area Final

4-5 September

Report by manager George Collin

The CA required us to take 10 area finalists (two from each of five clubs), play for two days and find an overall winner plus two others who deserved to go forward to the national final. All must have games that matter on both days. "Play it any way you like other than Egyptian." But how? A true Swiss would require six

rounds but experience tells us that five rounds (three on Saturday and two on Sunday) is all that people really want to play. We set ourselves the added proviso that no one should have to sit out a round and no one should have to play their clubmate.

We ended up with a modified American block, but only played five rounds. Everyone played at least one player from each of the other clubs. The format was drawn up on a diagram in advance, and the clubs drew cards for their place in the format so that it was seen to be fair. And so it was. Fortunately this region of America was free of bandits, and after three rounds everyone had one or two wins. After the full five rounds there were six players on two wins, three with three wins and one with four. Where the number of wins was equal the places were determined on net points.

The overall winner was Jonathan Hills from Colchester. His successive results (-23, +1(T), +6, +10, +26 (with a half-bisque standing)) tell their own story of how he started from the back of the pack and gradually overtook us all without our realising it.

The weather? Well, Prince Philip would have described it as an Indian summer.

Player	Club	Wins	Points
Jonathan Hills (7)	Colchester	4	+20
Derek Powell (8)	Letchworth	3	+30
Robert Staddon (12)	Letchworth	3	+16
George Collin (2)	Wrest Park	3	+2
Rob Edlin-White (10)	Nottingham	2	+14
Jim Potter (4)	Newport	2	+13
Chris Van Essen (4)	Newport	2	+1
Colin Hemming (8)	Colchester	2	-19
Peter Death (-½)	Nottingham	2	-29
John Bevington (2½)	Wrest Park	2	-48

The top three go through to the national final at Pendle CC on 18-19 September.

Postscript by the Editor

As Jonathan's last and most comprehensively defeated opponent I can vouch for his worthiness as the winner. He stuttered a little at the start of our game but then became unstoppable, hitting the ball more cleanly and confidently than any of my other opponents. One incident told the whole story. Early in the game he stuck in hoop three with blue. I was some ten yards away between hoops three and four and decided to shoot at blue, but went to check its position first and noticed that the hoop was pretty tight - tighter, or so it seemed, than when I had set it on Friday. I shot and missed. Later on Jonathan was for 4-back with blue but had left himself a good six-footer, which he ran cleanly. I commented on this and his general standard of shooting after the game, and he said he thought it was due to his playing a lot of one-ball games. Food for thought?

Craft Fair 28-30 August

Our annual presence at the Craft Fair got off to a slow start on the Saturday as most of the lawns were in use for the Mary Rose match, but picked up on Sunday and Monday. Many thanks to Davids P&W, Bryan, Irene, Dorothy, George, Tom & Judy, Peter & Elaine, Rodney, Eric, Tim, Mary, Peter S and Peter & Gordon who came along to help. We raised £99 and have a few names of

people who expressed an interest in the game and will be receiving a copy of this newsletter.

For your diary

Our last tournament of the season is on 17-19 September, and I believe there are still places available should you wish to enter. The Egyptian format allows you to play as many or as few games as you wish, so if you've never entered a tournament before why not have a go? Remember that if it's your first tournament you don't have to be a member of the Croquet Association. If you are interested please ring Eric Audsley (01462 768300).

Help wanted in the lock-up

Still on the subject of the tournament, we are looking for volunteers to help with locking up on Friday and Saturday evenings. To explain: on these evenings visiting players often go for a meal at the pub, and so do some of our playing members. It's nice to be able to get there in time to welcome them and introduce any players who haven't met - looking after our visitors is important as we want them to enjoy themselves so they come again and recommend our tournaments (which are a valuable source of revenue) to their friends.

However, one or two members of the club must wait until all the games for the day have been completed or pegged down, and then tidy up and lock up the huts before leaving. This means that they are often late for the meal at the pub, which is rather hard when you consider that they are often the same persons who have been down first thing in the morning to open up or who have been busy officiating all day as manager, referee or caterer. It would be appreciated if anyone who is free on Friday or Saturday and is thinking of coming down to watch could perhaps come a little later and stay to lock up. If you can help with this please let Eric know.

John Bevington

6 September 1999