



Running Hoops

The Newsletter of Kenilworth Croquet

July 2023

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What a busy month June has been! If I thought previous months were busy, I clearly hadn't yet experienced the club in full competitive swing. And with it comes a very busy newsletter and a rather out-of-breath editor trying to keep up with it all. With hindsight and certainly for next year, I would issue Running Hoops on a monthly basis for these busy months, rather than bi-monthly. So I suggest you make a cup of coffee now before settling down to digest this next newsletter.



Reports of WMF matches, national tournaments and internal competitions are somewhat overtaking social reporting, but the club has still enjoyed plenty of fun days. The Doubles Fun Day was once again,

exactly what its title would suggest. Fun and competitive at the same time, it produced a final result altogether different from previous years.

It followed our first Open Day for a number of years, which attracted a steady flow of interested people as well as family and friends, and again was much enjoyed by all members who helped out on the day. I suspect, though, that our membership will mainly increase by word of mouth, and we should all take every opportunity to sell our sport to the wider public, by talking about croquet, writing about it on Facebook, or at least 'liking' the comments of others to show our support; and inviting friends and acquaintances to come along for an afternoon as a guest, to introduce them to the game. With National



Croquet Week behind us, finishing with a flourish at the massive Inter Counties Championship in which two of our members competed (see later), it is to be hoped that our members will 'follow' on Facebook, the new Croquet England, Warwickshire County and the KTSCC pages, and that we, as a club, will continue to contribute to both.



Competition-wise, we are fortunate that many of our players play, or take part in events and tournaments, elsewhere in the UK and it's good to hear of croquet life in these other clubs. Reporting on such events in this edition has produced a surprising journalistic talent in Cliff Daniel, so Cliff now joins our honoured writers' club, and you will see quite a lot from Cliff later on in this edition!



In Meet the Committee, it's the turn of Tony Watmore and Ian Robertson to tell us about their role on the Committee and a little about their other lives away from croquet! It's fascinating to read about the wide variety of talents our members have, and how much time they donate to helping with other organisations and charities.

In Features, another new writer, whom those of us at the social sessions know well. Edith Cheung is



always keen to tell us about the game of Gateball she played in Hong Kong, which helped her to become a very accurate croquet player when she joined us a year ago. So together we compiled the article you can read on page 6. A game that only lasts for half an hour? Dream on, those of you who, like many of us, have endured marathon matches of up to 4 hours!

Elizabeth

CLUB NEWS

Club Open Day Elizabeth Thomson



Sunday 21st May was the date set for our Open Day to celebrate the start of National Croquet Week, and we were delighted to find that the day was to be warm and sunny with no rain forecast at all, and so it turned out to be. A band of willing volunteers arrived with contributions towards the refreshments offered to visitors, and mallets to hand in the hope of joining in some games. Lawns were quickly set up, half-lawns on Lawn 1, leaving Lawn 2 as a full lawn. In the pavilion, water heaters were filled, mugs, cakes and biscuits set out, and we were ready for our first visitors, with time to spare for a few games ourselves.



Teddy "Bonnie" runs a hoop, helped by Phoebe, while Indie stoically waits her turn.

The visitors arrived, a trickle to begin with, then in greater numbers, and the full Lawn 2 had to be divided quickly into two half-lawns to accommodate the guests and their host members. It was fun: the air punctuated by laughter, encouragement from other players and whoops of celebration when hoops were run. It was wonderful to see negativity – "I'm no use at this" – turning to positivity, when strokes began to improve and first hoops were run. Most visitors were happy to play on for a full game and it was nice to see others sitting outside in the sun and enjoying chatting and refreshments. It was lovely also to see young families arriving and children running around and having fun on the practice lawn trying their own hand (and Bonnie's) at croquet and running hoops with mini-mallets.

By 5 o'clock, the last of the visitors had departed and it was time to clear the lawns and the pavilion and head for home. Several of the visitors had expressed a definite interest in joining U3A croquet or the club itself and others left contact details for future use. It would be lovely to find we had gained a few new members by our efforts on the day, with whom to share our own love of the game; but in any case, I think we all enjoyed

the day ourselves very much, and the opportunity to showcase our facilities and increase public awareness of the game.

Special thanks are due to Phil Blake for coordinating the day in advance and issuing invitations to groups; to Lynne Breedon for organising on the day and arranging catering; to Adrian, Mervyn and Pauline, for introducing visitors to the game (and coaching members!); and to all the members who turned out to help, brought cakes, and welcomed visitors to our club.



Doubles Fun Day Sunday 4th June 2023 Elizabeth Thomson

The first Doubles Fun Day of the year was blessed with a beautiful sunny day, albeit with a somewhat chilly wind from the East. The usual crowd were down early, full of enthusiasm, all clad in whites, sun hats, sun glasses, sun cream – and warm fleeces!

The day was all-play-all, the usual hectic round of 7 games for each of the 8 pairs, often with only



enough time between games to down a quick glass of water, although we did manage a half hour break for lunch. But fun was the order of the day and fun it was: some serious concentration of course, but all in a friendly and supportive framework, with praise going as freely to the opposition as to partners.

In the end, Bob and Jan Phelps emerged as overall winners, closely followed in second place by Nick Hegan and Linda Edwards, with Tony Watmore and Elizabeth Thomson in third place.



Thanks go to Lynne Breedon for superb organisation of the day, which ran without a hitch, apart from time having to be called on one game which showed no sign of finishing (Phil B and Kath v Tony and Elizabeth!); to Linda Edwards, for providing an endless supply of scones with jam and cream to keep our energy up while we played; and to all others who helped set up on the day.





And we did manage to have half an hour sitting in the sun to eat our packed lunches and enjoy Linda's scones!



The Main KTSCC Pavilion Elizabeth Thomson

Apparently the absence of croquet players in the pavilion has been noticed at the main club. Researching this, I interviewed Andy, Manager of the main pavilion, and Tom, tennis coach and assistant barman, to find out just what facilities are available to all members of the club, including croquet.



The club house is a pleasant place to sit, with views out over the wide terrace, tennis courts and croquet lawns. Generous windows face SW and SE, thereby catching the sun for the full hours of daylight. The comfortable lounge has direct access to the bar, and a further room to the front, also with bar access, tables and chairs makes it a useful room for meetings, working or coffee. I had a pleasant



preliminary meeting there with Ian Robertson and Peter Dennis, and an enjoyable AC coffee and croquet chat morning when rain ruled out play. There are power points for laptops and free wifi, allowing work to be done, and it is warm and peaceful, except at parents' coffee and catch-up times while youngsters are having tennis lessons! A coffee machine provides lovely coffee for only £1.50/cup; a cold drinks vending machine and a small kitchen with sink, fridge, microwave and tea-making facilities are useful additions. There are spacious changing rooms each equipped with a sauna.



A full-sized table-tennis table for the use of all members, in a spacious room, allows expert players to show off their most flamboyant spins, or occupies youngsters while parents enjoy a drink at the bar (bats and balls available from the bar during bar opening hours – daily, from 4:00pm to 10:00pm). This room can be opened up to the front lounge to create a large entertaining facility which is available for hire for parties or private functions. The charge for afternoon hire eg for children's parties, is £20/hour, and for evening hire, £100 from 7:00pm till midnight.

Catering for private functions is provided by Leamington company Bit of a Do, although others have hired a mobile catering company, such as Potato Man (Kenilworth), or the Lazy Pig Co (Stratford). Vans park in the car park and serve food to party guests. For children's or other parties, parents are welcome to bring in, and serve, their own prepared food from home.

Outside, there is a beautiful spacious terrace, a stunning area to sit out on summer evenings with a drink after croquet or at weekends. The terrace faces SW and catches the full sun from morning till evening in summer and has a lovely outlook over the tennis courts with a grassy area in front for young children to play at weekends, while their grand/parents relax.



MEET THE COMMITTEE Tony Watmore



I have been asked by Elizabeth to put something together as an article for Running Hoops about myself as part of the "Getting to know your Committee Members" – so here goes.

I am Tony – aged 63 and married to Allison – also 62 (but unlike me looking loads younger) – I am definitely punching above my weight - and we are both members of the Croquet Club, as well as lurking on the edges of the Committee – me in the position of General Dogsbody to impart my limited wisdom – and Allison as the Safeguarding Officer. Although we are probably better known for organising the recent popular quizzes for the Croquet Club.

For those of you of a romantic nature – who like your Mills and Boon – we met whilst I was living/working in Birmingham and Allison living /working in Torquay.

Allison worked as a nurse with my mother – who set us up at a nurse's social event whilst I was down for Christmas. We went on a few dates - including Allison coming up to Birmingham and crashing into my car – before I proposed to her 3 weeks later. We spent 18 months courting - driving up and down the M5 – before marrying in April 1984 and moving into Kenilworth – when you could afford to buy a house as a first-time buyer.

So next April we will be 40 years married – a Ruby wedding anniversary I believe. I expect Allison will be hoping for some expensive jewellery of a Ruby nature whereas I was more anticipating a Ruby Murray, (curry)!

We have 2 daughters – Hannah (32) and Amy (31) and are expecting our first grandchild, (Amy's) in September. We are very excited about being grandparents and a new chapter in our lives. We did have a beloved King Charles Spaniel called Milly – who sadly died last year at an early age of only 9 and are looking to get another dog shortly – after the big 40th Wedding Anniversary holiday next year, (Canada or South America are on the shortlist). In the meantime, we have applied to foster dogs on a temporary basis with the Dogs Trust.

My working/professional life was in the field of Accountancy and Finance mainly in the insurance sector – in Coventry and Warwickshire - although my last role was within the Timber industry. Due to a health scare back in 2021, I decided – despite not having as much in the piggy bank as I would have liked – to retire. Along with a couple of other events occurring at the same time – my best friend passing away with dementia at 57 and a near fatal car crash – life suddenly seemed too short to be spent behind a desk, even though I thoroughly enjoyed my last role and the people I worked with.

During my working life though I have always found time to volunteer and immerse myself in the local community. I was a school Governor at Thorns, an active member of Kenilworth Round Table – proud to have been the Chairman in 2005 – when we were the largest table in the UK – organising the Kenilworth Fireworks and Bonfire that year and raising many thousands of £'s for the benefit of the local community. I was also chairman of an insurance software network – organising training and Conferences – which included several visits to our counterparts in the USA. I continue to do charitable work – doing the books for a charity and the local Rugby Club.

I have always been into my sports. My poison was rugby which I played from an early age. I played and captained my school, played for my county and University and was selected for a provisional England students' squad but sadly broke my arm very badly at the age of 18 - and did not play again for 6 years until I moved to Kenilworth and needed to socialise. I then played until I was 36 before my body – after dislocating my elbow, breaking my nose, numerous fingers and having both cartilages removed – was telling me that my playing days were over.

However, I immediately found another sport – golf, which I continued to play until some 6 years ago when those rugby injuries caught up with me, requiring a replacement knee followed by a replacement hip. I had acquired a handicap of 13 and it had always been my ambition to get it to 10. However, it just became too painful to play. I had to give up my regular Friday night 5-a-side football as well at the age of 56, when I was hoping to make it to 60. And so there was a void in my sporting life. I didn't particularly miss golf – except on a really nice day – which surprised both myself and Allison after 30 + years of sport. However, it had become a very expensive and time-consuming pastime. And then croquet came along.

I attended a social evening with Round Table/41 Club and really enjoyed it. I had thought that croquet was a genteel sport and didn't realise that it was strategic and basically at times could be quite vindictive in its competitiveness in trying to put your opponent at a disadvantage as much as trying to win the hoop.

It appealed to me straight away and filled that sporting void – and so I joined and am thoroughly glad I did. Early on I simply played at the social events and it came as quite a shock when suddenly you are on

your own playing with 2 balls and learning strategies and that it wasn't simply aiming for the hoop. I think I am improving – well my handicap has come down from 10 to 8 – but I am still learning all the time.

Different opponents have different styles and you sometimes have to adapt accordingly. Phil Blake is a master of the long shot and you have to keep him as far away from the hoop as possible. I only have one working eye, and whilst it never seemed to affect me with rugby, it did with other sports – darts, snooker and even golf, because I have little perception of depth. In golf I could only improve when I had built up experience of the lie of the greens – but once I did, putting was my main strength. I think that has kept me in good stead for croquet although I prefer to position balls to block an opponent because I struggle with long shot take-outs. I think finally acquiring my own mallet is also going to help my game as I am getting used to it, having bought it off the shelf so to speak without trying it. No problem with the length just getting used to the weight.

Everybody at the club has been friendly and helpful and always willing to give advice which is much appreciated and I look forward to many years at the club. My aim is to get my handicap down and play in either competitions or friendly matches at other clubs when I feel I have the confidence not to embarrass myself.

Outside of croquet and working for local charities and clubs my interests are as follows: Wine – (by the bottle rather than the glass); Torquay United Football Club; Gardening; Holidays – my aim is to have at least 4 a year including a cruise; Golf – my son-in-law has taken the game up and I would like to play with him at least once a month in the summer and help him get his handicap down.

And soon to be – learning Grandparenting skills.

Ian Robertson – Membership Secretary



I took up croquet after my good friend and neighbour, Gordon Henderson, introduced me to the sport in 2013, when I moved back to Kenilworth after an absence of 34 years in Stockport.

I still remember the time and patience which Adrian and Alan Richardson gave me in the early days, showing me the ropes of the AC code. I have to say I preferred then and now, the constant tactical manoeuvrings of the GC code, rather than sitting on the touchline of AC games waiting my turn. I find the GC tactics and options fascinating (clearly I lack the technique for AC).

I joined the committee without a specific role, when Adrian, Ray Clipson, John Copping, Jean Wilson and Mike Cheeseman were mostly running the show. Once Mike stepped down as membership secretary, I took up the role and once Stella Gill stepped down from organising the Presentation Dinners, I took that role up. Around 50 people attended the dinner earlier this year.

I've spent a fair amount of time giving GC demos to prospective members over the last few years. Many but not all those have resulted in recruiting new members. I always see it as a thrill to explain that if tied at 6-6 we then play the "Golden Hoop"; let's face it, what other sport can claim such an inspiring term!

I am also, currently, the "hub" for many, but not all, of the communications to members using the stylized branding format of mallet, ball and hoop everyone is familiar with.

I managed to get through to a couple of the GC All England regional finals at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, but certainly didn't distinguish myself there, but it was good experience and I'd commend it to anyone. I would like to play more games but my main pursuit is golf at the Warwickshire Golf Club at Leek Wootton and play there three times a week, so time is squeezed for playing more croquet. I guess I'm more successful at golf having won two pieces of silverware in the last three years and the runner up in the singles knockout (the numbers competing in the golf comps exceed 80, so it's serious competition).

By contrast, I sing in a community choir (Bad Vibrations) based at Kenilworth School where we lean towards popular material. I recently joined a U3A art group and particularly enjoy painting village scenes. Plus, I've been a member of Kenilworth Lions for about eight years, encouraged by Gordon.

Errata

Editor: In the best practice of editorship (and in the smallest print!) I have to express my apologies to the Hoopless team at the recent Quiz night for the misprint of their team name, as Hopeless! Bob requested a formal Errata in print, but being another Latin scholar, I corrected him to no more than one Erratum. Unfortunately a few days later, this had to revert to the original Errata, when I realised I had sent the wrong copy of the Quiz Night report, which also had the wrong spelling of Allison Watmore's name, to the KTSCC for their newsletter! I now humbly apologise to Bob and Jan, Lynn, Tony and Lin, and to Allison for my careless editing!

FEATURES

Gateball Edith Cheung

Edith joined our club at the end of 2022 and despite never having played croquet before, immediately caught our attention by how accurate a player she was. Edith explained that in Hong Kong she had played a game called Gateball, which is not unlike croquet, though uses different equipment. Gateball was invented in Japan by Suzuki Kazunobu in 1947. At the time there was a severe shortage of rubber needed to make the balls used in many sports. Suzuki, then working in the lumber industry on the northern island of Hokkaido, realised there was a ready supply of the wood used to make croquet balls and mallets. He revised the rules of croquet and created Gateball as a game for young people and now governed by the World Gateball Union.

Gateball is now practised world-wide: it is particularly popular in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, but is growing in many other countries around the world including Canada and Australia.



Balls can be struck in either the traditional croquet stance, or sideways, like a golf stroke. The hoops are made of a metal wire and are broader and lower than croquet hoops and there are only 3 hoops on the court and one goal pole (peg) in the centre. The playing area is smaller than a croquet lawn at 20m x 15m. The game appears to have some features of Golf Croquet, along with some of Association Croquet, in that by hitting another ball with your own ball (a roquet in AC) you are entitled to one more stroke. Similarly, hitting your ball through a hoop gains you an extra stroke.

Edith very kindly brought her Gateball equipment along with her one evening to let us all see it, and we tried playing a few shots with her mallets. We were surprised by how light the metal mallets were, and the shafts unscrewed in the centre for packing and travelling. The head is round with a smaller diameter and shorter length than a croquet mallet head.



The balls are smaller and lighter than croquet balls and are numbered 1-10, the playing order, odd numbers red, for one team, even numbers white, for the opposing team. A game is won by hitting all the team's balls in turn, through all 3 gates and then hitting the central goal pole, and the game only lasts half an hour. One point is scored for each hoop run and two points for hitting the pole, a maximum of 5 points for each player and 25 for the whole team. If neither team has finished when time is called,

then the winning team is the one who has scored the highest number of points at that stage.

For more information on the game, click the link below.

[Gateball - Wikipedia](#)

For a YouTube video link to the game, click this link:

[Let's play GB English 640pix - YouTube](#)

Editor: I was surprised to read on their website that St Agnes Croquet Club in Cornwall has recently introduced members to the game of Gateball! Could other clubs follow suit?

CAPTIONS

Following Mervyn Harvey's description of a new version of GC they had been playing in Sarasota, Florida, named 'Snake in the grass', Pauline later sent in this photograph from the club's newsletter and I invited suggestions for a caption for the photograph.



Here are my favourites.

"After blue, red should clear black." (Adrian)

"If I stay still long enough, they might let me off the hoop." (Rachael)

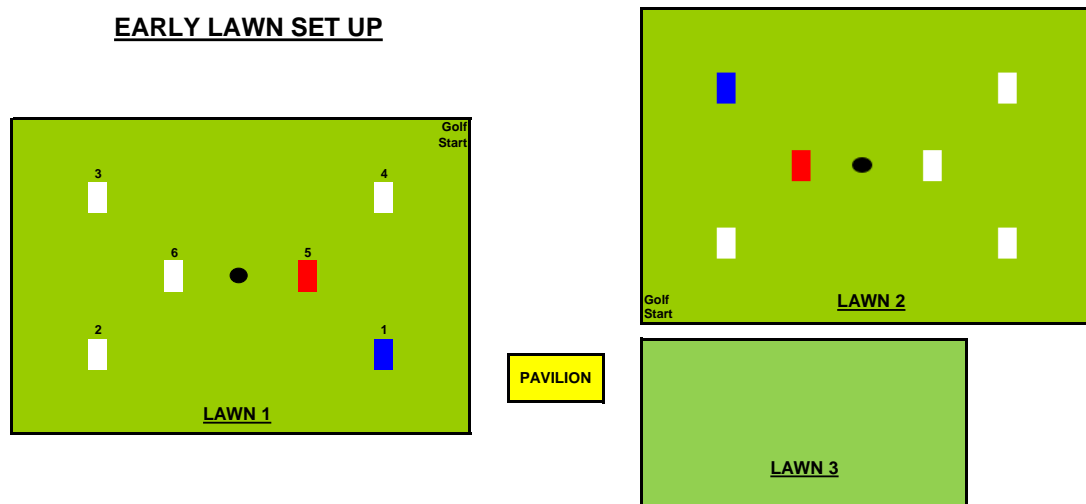
"Can I play too?" (Maureen)

"Could I snake up on red unnoticed?" (Anon)

CONFUSED BY LAWN LAYOUT? Adrian Morris

Reading about the history of the club reminds me of a story I was once told.

When the second lawn was introduced, the lawns were set up so that each lawn "started" near the pavilion. See diagram.



This made perfect sense to us!

However, when opposing teams arrived, they were totally bamboozled and would easily lose their direction.

After a while we converted to the current format which I have to admit makes better sense. For a while though, our own players became confused until they themselves got used to the "new" layout.

Visit to Budleigh Salterton Croquet Club Elizabeth Thomson

Sheena and I met many years ago in Dunblane, Perthshire, and quickly found we shared many interests and had both worked in the same profession. In the halcyon days when young mothers stayed at home with young children, we walked, talked and coffee'd while children played; paddled in moorland burns; climbed Dumyat; and when children's bedtime came and freedom beckoned in the evenings, we played badminton, squash and bridge. In time, we moved away to different areas of England, built new lives, but always kept in touch. So it shouldn't have come as a surprise to discover last year that we had both taken up croquet.

By this time, Sheena and David had moved to Budleigh Salterton, on the south coast, where they had joined the local croquet club, while we had joined Kenilworth and U3A Croquet, and very soon a weekend visit to Budleigh was arranged to meet up again and play croquet. The club name had cropped up several times in croquet sessions in Kenilworth – Adrian played in an AC tournament there last year, and Nick had recently been on holiday in the region and had gone up out of interest to visit the club. Both talked of the 11 manicured lawns and other facilities, like overnight accommodation. I could add Bridge Club and mini-allotments to their list.



Clearly a very different experience from our own friendly little club in Kenilworth. However I was encouraged to hear that Sheena had been out all one morning, helping with introductory coaching for 23 new Summer Membership beginners – clearly a club where you could still volunteer to help in different ways, if not with scarifying and aerating lawns, leaf-clearing, painting buildings and bus shelters!



Sheena had selected a weekend for us when there was least activity scheduled at the club, but was caught out when she went to book lawns, and found a new tournament had been added, block-booking 10 of their 11 lawns! Fortunately, as numbers settled, more lawns were released and she managed to book morning and afternoon sessions for each of our 3 days there. The men would join us for morning doubles and we would play singles or Short Croquet in the afternoons.

The weekend was a huge success as we talked and caught up on the missing years and made full use of their club in the 3 days' play we had there. I loved their lawns and the ability to watch tournament

players in action, (including Brian Shorney of Eardisley Club, who was Chairman of the WMF before Adrian), only once forgetting the rule of silence on adjacent lawns when I scored with a magnificent jump shot, and all action stopped as the men in whites turned heads to see who had distracted them from play. I was introduced to a Budleigh player, David Warhurst, who was Scottish and had lived for a few years in Stewarton, the village where I grew up!

So, was I envious of their immaculate lawns, bridge club, mini-allotments? Not at all. I love my own club and the fantastic people who play there, and that will never change. So did I dislike the large club and much larger membership? Not that either. Contrary to expectations, the members, and even the competitors we spoke to, were friendly, welcoming and interested in us. David and Sheena are fully involved with looking after their mini-allotment, volunteering for bar duty, coaching beginners, maintaining garden borders and flower barrels, and committee duty, Sheena acting as Chair of the Croquet section for a year and now of the Bridge section. You get as much from a club as you put in and it certainly dominates their lives.



I think the biggest thrill for me was seeing, and playing at, another club, regardless of standard. I felt some of the excitement tournament players must experience when stepping on to new lawns to compete at other clubs, meeting new players and exchanging experiences. I would seriously suggest to anyone going on holiday in the UK, to have a look at any local croquet club, and ask if they could play as a visitor. We have already been invited to play any time at St Agnes in Cornwall, a club about the size of Kenilworth, and I can't wait for my next dog-sitting invitation from my niece there, to take them up on the offer. Alternately, ask Phil Blake about the possibility of playing in one of the tournaments Adrian listed in the March issue of Running Hoops. I'd be happy to join anyone in making up a carload.

And now, just in time for Competition Time, we welcome the return to our pages of dear Marj, that fount of wisdom on anything croquet related! This month, she tackles a very relevant topic.

Dear Marj

So pleased that Running Hoops is back with us – and just in time for me to have my say about Advantage Croquet, which I cannot see is to anyone's advantage. I know that you are of the old school, Marj, and hopefully, like me, can't be doing with these gimmicks. They won't listen to me – so perhaps you could use some of your down to earth Aussie logic and get back to doing what we always used to.

Frank Lee-Speaking

Dear Frank

I'd like to say what a pleasure it is to hear from you. Normally I just deal with misunderstandings relating to the rules, and don't lobby for or against them. However, you ask for my view – so here it is.

Given a choice, I personally would just play level games against those of similar ability, but that only works in larger clubs. So – we need something, and if we were starting from scratch, would we come up with what we have now? I think not.

But first – for those who don't know – Advantage Croquet requires the better player to score more hoops than their opponent.

I stand to be corrected, but while there are quite a few sports that have ways of enabling people of different ability to compete on level terms, none of them do it in ways that can fundamentally change the play. What immediately comes to mind with the old system is that the lesser player can do an impossible shot, such as clearing a ball that is firmly in the jaws (by hitting the ball behind the hoop and then clearing with the extra turn). Can you imagine a tennis player being able to hit the ball twice? The old system presents a problem for the recipient, in deciding when to use an extra turn. I have seen more bad choices than I have had kangaroo steaks, and I once witnessed someone using four extra turns on one hoop and still losing it! As a long-time coach, I need to hold an extra session just to deal with using extra turns. The better player also has the problem of knowing how long to wait to see whether the recipient intends to use an extra turn.

But back to other individual sports. All the ones I can think of have a system which, one way or another, require better players to score more points, eg archery; ten-pin bowling; snooker. Exactly how they do it varies with the sport, but my rationale is that they don't change the nature of it or make players change their tactics. Even horse-racing adds extra weights for the better horses to carry. Now there's a thought; how about getting your better players to carry extra weights on their backs, based on how much better they are than their opponent!

And before you start talking about complex calculations to determine who has to run more or fewer hoops – they are all done and the starting hoops are pinned up on most pavilion boards. And yes, things get a bit complicated when time runs out in time-limited handicap games – but does your club ever run such competitions? No, I thought not. And if they ever did, the organiser will work out who won.

So, Frank, you may not like it, but I think that giving lesser players fewer hoops to jump through, so to speak, is best for all. I must end now, as I need to work out when to slow down if I ever find myself ahead in a time-limited Advantage game, with time soon to run out. Sneaky maybe – but surely not as bad as sandpapering a cricket ball!

Yours

Marj

COMPETITION TIME

The Wider Croquet Community

Cheltenham Easter AC Tournament 13-14 May 2013 Cliff Daniel



Cheltenham Croquet Club is one of the largest and oldest in Britain with 10 full size lawns, 2 half size lawns and a practice area. They have a wide variety of members, ranging from beginners to players of county and international standard. The Club has hosted a number of major championships including the 2005 World Championships and the 2009 European Team Championship. The Croquet Club is located in a quiet residential area of the town and is only an hour's drive from the Kenilworth area, which makes it an easy club to get to and needn't involve an overnight stay.



The Easter weekend comprised two days of competition, Saturday and Sunday, 13-14th May, involving 22 players with handicaps ranging from -2 to 7, with several players below zero. My handicap is 4.5 so, remembering that all games were to be played 'level', it was clear that I was facing a challenging couple of days! The main event, for the Bernard Neal Cup, is organised on a knockout basis, with the top two seeds, James Death and Mark Suter - finalists in 2022 - having handicaps of -2.

My first opponent was Robert Wilkinson (h/cap -1), whom I knew from other tournaments but had never actually played before. For about 30 minutes the game was reasonably close but once Robert gained in confidence and got used to the pace of the lawn he demonstrated his superiority and ran out an easy winner, 26-3, inside 90 minutes. Incidentally the games, unusually, were untimed, whereas often in tournament play, a limit of 3 hours is imposed. At this standard the top players rarely need 3 hours to score the requisite 26 points!

This early finish allowed me time, before a second game could be arranged, to check out new mallet options in the CA Shop, which is located at this Club and is managed by James Death himself, who, unsurprisingly, had completed his first game in a similar time! However James, who is a very good friend of mine, declared that my inability consistently to hit short roquets was probably an 'operator' problem rather than a 'mallet' problem.... so I saved myself a few hundred pounds!

My next opponent was Jack Good, a 16 year old boy who is new to the AC game and currently has a handicap of 6. However my hopes of having lengthy turns, running several hoops, were soon to be dashed! Jack, I soon learnt, is a highly promising player surely destined to rapidly improve his handicap. His swing is so smooth and straight that he made roquets and hoop-running look incredibly easy and he won 26-5. It came as no surprise to me to learn that last year he had been **WORLD NUMBER ONE UNDER-SIXTEEN AT GOLF CROQUET!!**

My third opponent of the day was Neal Bacon - the top player in the Warwickshire County team - rapidly improving, and now playing off a handicap of -1. He seemed to have adjusted well and was always in control in the game, winning 26-3.

So at the end of day one, not only had I lost all 3 games but I had failed to get even one ball through one-back - a significant feat in the Advanced Game, for it allows the opponent a 'lift' shot!

However it had been a joy to play croquet on such wonderful lawns, and of course, my 'slate bill' at the bar was ZERO, for it is customary for victorious opponents to buy the drinks! Another bonus was that I was able to return to Leamington at a reasonable time, which pleased my fiancée Chris!

The second day proved to be a much better one. For my first game I was paired against Jim Blekinsop (h/cap 3) who was a member of Cheltenham Croquet Club. Our game started at 9.30am and was delicately poised at 12.30pm when the familiar lunch bell was rung. We agreed to pause our game to partake of the fabulous home-made food available. After lunch either of us could have secured victory but I managed to win 26-22.

The index points I gained on my handicap card for beating a player with a better handicap offset the points I had conceded the previous day with my 3 defeats. Moreover, I was so thrilled with this win, that it spurred me to choose to spectate the final, rather than play a further 5th game.

It is always a pleasure to watch James Death play. He is a very exciting player - a cheerful and friendly character, who always has a smile on his face and is ready to chat to those around him. Unsurprisingly he won 2-0 in a 'best of three' final against Nick Parish and retained the trophy he had won last year. James will probably feature in the closing stages of the World AC Championships, to be played in July of this year.



James Death in action at Cheltenham

My next outing will be to take part in the AC Inter County Championship at Southwick at the end of the National Croquet Week, 27-29th May, as part of the Warwickshire team, along with Adrian Morris from our club. I'm very much looking forward to the weekend.

Editor: Lovely to hear about Cliff's enjoyment of his first tournament this year.

Inter Counties AC Championship 27-29 May 2023 Cliff Daniel

The AC inter counties event is generally regarded as being the biggest festival of croquet in the world. Fortunately for Adrian and myself, Warwickshire is one of the weakest counties croquet-wise and so we are able to be part of this annual fixture! Over 150 players, mostly A class players (some ranked in the top 10 players in the world), all dressed immaculately in whites (apart from Wiltshire who have 'green & white check' clothing, suggesting the players have part-time work as chefs!!), compete on the lawns at Eastbourne and Southwick, Brighton.

There are two divisions that are so dissimilar in standard that the teams that get promoted to the top Division usually get relegated back to the second division rather quickly! Within each division each county plays each of the other counties, over 3 or 4 days, with each game, timed for 3 hours, played to the rules of Advanced Association Croquet, so there are plenty of 'leaves & lifts', but not a bisque in sight!!



Warwickshire had a squad of 8 players with handicaps ranging from -1 to 4.5. The squad was made up of Adrian & Cliff from Kenilworth, Ian from Edgbaston, Neale from Nottingham, Andrew

from Newport (Essex), Ken (Captain) from Bury, Roger from Reigate and Peter from Switzerland, so several croquet clubs were represented! Each match comprised 3 games of doubles, so there were always 2 of our squad able to watch and encourage the other six.

On day 1 we played our first match v Dorset and we lost 0-3 and so thoughts of 'winning' (?) the wooden spoon yet again, came to our minds!! However in the second match we dumfounded even ourselves by winning 3-0 v Cheshire and, prematurely(!), began to dream of finishing the tournament mid-table. The third match on day 1 was lost 1-2 to Glamorgan, but we felt reasonably happy as a team as we celebrated with our evening meal at a local Italian restaurant.



Day 2 began with a very disappointing match. Against Kent, a county we dramatically beat in 2022, we were heading for a 3-0 victory, but owing to a combination of bad luck and inspired play by our opponents, we contrived to lose 0-3!

We had no match during the afternoon and for the evening match v Gloucestershire the captain, Ken, decided to bring me into the team to play! I was paired with Roger from Reigate and we played as second pair on lawn 1, close to lots of spectators! Naturally I was a little nervous but our game started well. Roger, with handicap 0.5, was a very experienced player and very encouraging towards me. We were soon 5 hoops up, thanks to an opening I had not played before and a useful hit-in by Roger at the fourth turn. We gradually built on this lead and I was pleased with my hoop running. When time was called, to our surprise we had beaten a pair who, with handicaps of -1 and +1 should really have beaten us! Adrian, partnered with Ken, also managed a win with both Warwickshire players holding their nerve in a very tight finish. Hence we won the match 2-1 and this, our second victory this year, was against a team that subsequently gained promotion to the top division. Ken, our captain, was so thrilled with this victory that he insisted on buying a large bottle of prosecco at our team dinner that evening!



On day 3 our first match was against Suffolk who were unbeaten as a team at that time. We duly lost 0-3. Our second match was v Wiltshire, a team we thought we could beat...and indeed very nearly did. However we lost 1-2 which meant that our final match v Norfolk/Lincolnshire was a critical one. Our captain decided therefore to field our strongest 6 players, resting himself and me. Our star player Neal rose to the challenge and, after embarking on an attempted 'triple peel' engineered a win in rapid time. Adrian, playing with Roger, played possibly his best game of the tournament with two sizeable breaks, and won his game by a large margin. And the third game was also won, albeit narrowly and on time.

So we finished seventh out of the nine teams in our division and we were extremely happy.

The Norfolk/Lincolnshire team fielded the most inspirational croquet player I have ever met. Jonathan Toye is an extremely cheerful, positive player, who plays quite quickly, with minimal stalking of shots, and runs hoops consistently well...and yet... **ONLY HAS THE USE OF ONE ARM!**]

I particularly enjoyed the 5 day trip. We had excellent weather; we stayed at our usual quirky hotel near to the lawns; and we had a huge amount of laughter and camaraderie within the team.

WMF GC Match Kenilworth v Broadwas at Kenilworth Wed 31 May 2023 Philip Wood

For 31 May it was a very cool day, with plenty of wind, and overcast all day. The lawns were playing at a normal sort of speed, much faster than two weeks earlier, and a good deal faster than only a week before.

Our total handicaps (-1, 2, 2, 2) were slightly better than theirs (0, 1, 2, 4) and we expected the usual tough contest.

After a round of singles we were 2-2. Mervyn Harvey, after a winter's practice in Florida, was playing well, but we expected Broadwas to improve - they had had only a week or so to practise at their Club because the lawns had been too wet for play until then. Nevertheless, we won the next round 3-1, and the third round we won 4-0. The last round of singles went 2-2, meaning that we had won the match, and the last round of two games of doubles (which went 2-2) was a formality.

Mervyn (handicap 2) starred with 4 singles games won, Philip Wood (2) won 3, while Philip Mander (2) and Philip Blake (-1) won 2 each. So we won the match 12 games to 6.

Broadwas lost four of their singles games by 6-7, and had they won three of these the match would have ended 8-8 in games, so it really was a much more closely fought match than might appear from the final score.

Kenilworth have now won two matches, with one more, against Eardisley, to come, at home on July 5th.

Editor: the press report of this match made it on to the Sport pages of The Leamington Courier (and Kenilworth Weekly News) accompanied by a large photograph. As a club we are now achieving quite a high profile through several prominent articles recently, some even making the back page.



Stony Stratford GC Friendly 13th June Pauline Harvey



A team of 10 members met Stony Stratford at home for the first friendly match of the year, arranged very kindly by Pauline Harvey. The team of Ian Robertson, Nick Hegan, Peter Kristunas, Tim Naylor, Tony Watmore, Pauline Harvey, Anne Langley, Philip Wood, Alan Worrall and Elizabeth Thomson, with handicaps ranging from 2 to 11, prophesied an interesting day ahead! But things did not go quite as planned...

The auspices leading up to the match were not good! The organiser's internet was fried by Sunday's thunderstorm, and the team was not finalised by the time the match started. The organiser, and now player, lost a crown and post eating her breakfast, and had to make a hasty visit to

the dentist! Thanks to Alan, who sacrificed packing for his holiday to play in the afternoon, and Philip W stepping in to take the place of one of our players, who became unwell, we managed to field a full team for all the games.

The sun shone, but there was a very welcome cooling breeze, which made for a very pleasant day. Our visitors had trudged their way from Stony Stratford, taking almost twice the expected time, negotiating road closures (due to a jack-knifed lorry), and many sets of roadworks, but were revived by a seat in the shade, and suitable refreshments (although we couldn't satisfy a request for gin and tonic, with ice!)

The games were very close, with most having only one hoop separating the two sides. The result looked very one-sided, in Kenilworth's favour: winning 12 games, losing two, and drawing two (the games were timed), but the reality is that most of the results could easily have gone the other way. I hesitate to single anyone out, but Peter K and Tony W, and Nick and Tim, proved particularly formidable pairings.



Enjoying a cool break in the shade before tea is served.

As always, we enjoyed a splendid tea, with many delicious homemade savouries and cakes, with Peter's mini-quiches and Elizabeth's legendary chocolate cake being especially popular. Should we wonder why Stony Stratford keep coming?!

We have been promised a return fixture in September, which would be our first away fixture since before Covid. Something to look forward to later in the season!

Longman Cup St Albans v Shrewsbury 20 June 2023 Mervyn Harvey

From time to time, we are asked to hire out our lawns to two teams from north and south, or east and west, of us – to reduce the distance each has to travel. So it was that we hosted a second-round match of the Longman Cup, between Shrewsbury and St Albans on Wednesday 20 June. This is an AC handicap competition, open to all clubs, but restricted to players with AC handicap of 4 or higher. We play Shrewsbury in the West Midlands league, and one of their players was well known to us – but they were all a very friendly bunch – which was just as well as it turned out.

We knew that rain was forecast for the night before, but stopping soon after the match was due to start – but forecasts aren't always right! When I arrived just before 9:00 am, there were large lakes on both lawns – and so the rain must have been heavy and prolonged. By that time, both teams were well on their way, and the response to my email (as I didn't have phone numbers) came back that they would be with us by 9:30, but maybe go off to a café. I was able to offer some hope of play, as our lawns generally drain fairly quickly – and the Pavilion was as good as any café! The lakes visibly reduced in size, but the rain continued, albeit now more of a drizzle. I left it up to the captains to decide when to start, but observed that lawn 2 was draining better than lawn 1. At around 11:00, I hit a few balls on each lawn, and those on lawn 1 left a trail of spray, but much less so on lawn 2. We therefore decided that they should all warm up on lawn 2, and eventually started the two singles games at about 11:15. By 11:40, lawn 1 was just about playable, and so the doubles game started. The agreed time limit was 3 hours for all games, and so it was clear that we were in for a late finish. As it was, each of them had a bite to eat when the other player was on the lawn, and they did well to complete the match soon after 6:00pm.

Meanwhile, some croquet was played! In the morning session, Shrewsbury lost the doubles game but won the two singles games, so 2-1 to Shrewsbury. The afternoon session pitted together pairs of players in order of handicap for four more singles games. The best players had handicaps of 4 and 4½, and the middle four around 10/11. St Albans won two of these and Shrewsbury won one, and so the result depended on the game between a 20 handicapper from St Albans and a 14 from Shrewsbury. The contrast could not have been greater. The former had been playing on/off for many years, but, in his words, "has good days and bad days". His tactics were very good, and this appeared to be one of his good days. The Shrewsbury player only started playing late last year, and had evidently improved very quickly. However, his tactical development was, understandably, at a stage where he was not likely to get more than one or two hoops per visit. In the end, the higher handicap player ran out the winner, and so St Albans won the match by **four:three**. They are no strangers to success, as they won the cup in 2021.

These days require managing, which I was happy to do. However, I was very grateful to Cliff and Elizabeth, who took over between 12:30 and 16:30. Elizabeth stayed on (as there were no wild horses to try to drag her away!), and did all the washing up – but was also keen to learn from the good play between the top players, who would have been around the same standard as Adrian and Cliff. And last but not least, this was a hire, and so brought in welcome extra funds for the kitty.

AC Church Stretton v Kenilworth 21 June 2023 Cliff Daniel

On Tuesday 20 June, Philip Wood was taken ill. I was informed by Pauline Harvey over the phone and I persuaded her to take his place, even though she was a little reluctant to do so!

It was agreed that Cliff should partner her in the morning doubles - and hopefully help her to feel quite relaxed - and enable her to pick up useful tactics for her singles game in the afternoon.

In the doubles Pauline played remarkably well...her smooth swing helping her to run hoops confidently and make short roquets reliably. Pauline was incisive when 'blobbing' hoop 5 to use our precious bisque to good effect. In fact she gained sufficiently in confidence to choose to run hoop 6 ambitiously (rather than safely) so that she could continue to run 1-back as well! The match was reasonably close throughout but the visiting pair carefully protected their slender lead to win 13-5 on time.



In Mervyn's morning singles match he thought he was in for a difficult match for his opponent (handicap 20!!) started incredibly well with a long roquet and 3 inch perfect shots to get hoop 1. Austin, with the help of his 14 bisques, got a good lead. Eventually however, wasting several bisques, he left Mervyn an opportunity of a four ball break, allowing him to execute a 9 hoop break without needing to use a bisque himself. Hence Mervyn created a lead and soon afterwards, once Austin ran out of bisques, Mervyn proceeded to use his bisques to complete victory 26-12.

In the other morning singles game Phil Mander played his usual risk-taking game. He attempted, and failed (!) to run hoop 1 on his opening shot, and also on his 3rd turn too. Not having played much for 7 months, he felt quite rusty and soon found himself 5-0 down. However, things suddenly clicked and he started to gain ground against Brian Christmas, the top player from Church Stretton. With 3 attempted peels, 1 jump shot and a useful 60 foot roquet he consolidated his lead, eventually winning 18-13 on time.

So at lunch Kenilworth were in the lead 3-0...needing to win just one of the afternoon matches to secure overall victory.

During lunch there was torrential rain ...producing several puddles on both lawns...necessitating shortening the afternoon matches to 2.5 hours by playing 18-pointers.

In Mervyn's afternoon singles he was seeking revenge over Mary Proctor, to whom he had lost last year. Whilst the lawn was extremely wet, Mary set up a sizeable lead using her bisques and generally using a two-balling tactic. As the lawn dried out Mervyn's confidence grew and produced a few mini-breaks. There followed a period of 'cat and mouse' but once Mary missed a short roquet Mervyn was able to capitalise and managed to run his final 7 hoops and win the game 18-12 without using any more of his bisques.

Phil Mander found good form in his game and, fully focussed, quickly achieved an 8-0 lead. Wet lawns stifled his play somewhat but 3 successful long roquets helped him escape from potential difficulties and, unusually, was able to peg out to win at 18-12.

Cliff, playing against the Church Stretton top player Brian Christmas, made an excellent start hitting missable roquets and running hoops confidently, to set up a commanding lead. However Brian rallied well and did threaten briefly to catch up, before Cliff regained the initiative and won 18-8 with plenty of time remaining.

Pauline had quite a challenge ahead of her, playing against Austin who had a similar handicap to her. She had never before played an AC game on a full sized lawn. She was playing on lawns she was not used to, with the added complication of several puddles. Also she needed to choose when to use her 12 bisques! There is little wonder that she found the challenge quite stressful, at one point declaring her brain to be feeling quite addled! However she did keep quite calm, with her smooth swing again serving her well. When time was called, realising she had a reasonable lead, she sensibly left the balls on the lawn placed awkwardly for her opponent and won 13-5.

So the Kenilworth team won their first match of the season 7-0, with a team including, for the very first time, a lady, who hopefully, now that she is somewhat more experienced with the complexities of AC croquet, will wish to play more of this absorbing game.



And another coup for Sports' Editor, Adrian!

All-England Handicap Championship 25 June 2023 Elizabeth Thomson

This promised to be an exciting day as the new Advantage Golf Croquet handicap system was being trialled for the first time in a day competition at Kenilworth. There were 4 competitors: Philip Mander, Ian Robertson, Tony Watmore and Elizabeth Thomson, handicaps, in order, 2, 3, 8 and 8, a decent range on which to test the new system. The 2 lower handicapped players were nervous about having to score more hoops than usual, while the higher handicappers were optimistic at the prospect of requiring fewer hoops to win!



We were lucky with the weather, in that the day which started hot and sunny, clouded over after midday and a welcome breeze kept us pleasantly cool. Nerves settled and some fierce battles ensued, with two games in particular taking a very long time to complete, those between Phil and Elizabeth, and Ian and Elizabeth, both games going to Golden Hoops.



At the end of the day, the final scores astonished us all: of the 6 games played, 4 went to Golden Hoops and the remaining 2 games ended in 7-5 wins. Since the purpose of handicaps is to allow weaker players to compete comfortably with more experienced players, the new system proved to be extremely accurate in achieving the desired results. The games were very evenly balanced and everyone enjoyed the experience.

In the end, Phil Mander emerged a worthy winner, winning all of his games, and will now progress to the next round, to be held at Leicester. His game against Elizabeth went to a Golden Hoop, 7-6, with 7-5 wins against Tony and Ian. Tony was runner-up with two wins, both going to Golden Hoops, 7-6, against Ian and Elizabeth and was followed by Ian with one win, 7-6, against Elizabeth, another Golden Hoop finish. And lastly, Elizabeth, whose only claim to fame was that she took all of her opponents to a Golden Hoop!

Shot of the match must go to Phil, who knocked Elizabeth's ball out of hoop 2 from the furthest hoop 1 corner, a distance almost the full length of the lawn, earning him a generous round of applause from the crowd of Phil B and Sandy, and even from his own opponent. Now I know why he is such a good AC player! Second shot of the match must be Elizabeth, always modest (!), who ran hoop 7 in the same match and followed it up with hoop 8 with her next stroke, which got nothing but laughter!



We had a brilliant day and our thanks go to Phil Blake for arranging all the entries, and planning, setting up, organising and refereeing on the day. Not forgetting the ever-patient Sandy, our spectator 'crowd' for the day, dish washer, helper, friend. And we all wish Phil Mander the very best in the next levels of the competition. I'm sure he will do very well.

Kenilworth Club Competitions

The Charlecote Cup Bob Phelps

The GC Charlecote Cup matches were completed in May. In the semi-finals, Bob Phelps beat Robert Zara in 2 games, 7-3, 7-6, a close finish with the second game going to a Golden Hoop; and Jeff Lindsay beat Alan Worrall in 2 similar games, 7-6, 7-4.

The Final was played on Friday 2nd June on a warm and sunny lawn 2, between Jeff and Bob. Jeff was a comfortable winner of the first game.



The second game went to a golden hoop, resulting in Bob levelling the match at one game each. So it was all to play for in game three, with Bob managing to win another tight game at the Golden Hoop.

So the Charlecote Cup winner for 2023 is Bob Phelps, with a score of 4-7, 7-6, 7-6. Commiserations to Jeff Lindsey.



Having been part of the winning Hoopless quiz team in April, and, along with his wife Jan, winning the pairs competition on 4th June, Bob is off to buy himself a lottery ticket before his luck runs out!

Editor: (And when he wins the lottery, we will be expecting a few bottles of fizz to appear in the pavilion shortly after.) So we have a new name to be engraved on the Charlecote Cup! Congratulations to Bob, a worthy winner, and to runner-up Jeff – the number of Golden Hoops in these final rounds shows just how close the competition was. Bob was presented with his cup during the Doubles Fun Day, by last year's winner, Pauline Harvey.

The Pindi Cup has been slow to get going, with only one block so far making much progress. It was pointed out to me that this was because the deadline for completing the blocks is not **until 30th July**, which is a useful way of staggering the competitions and allowing people more time to complete League games, the Charlecote and Kenilworth Cups whose final dates are earlier.

The Kenilworth Cup (last date for first round matches is 16th July) was set up with 18 players. In a preliminary round, Phil Blake beat Ray Pickering and Jeff Lindsay beat Robert Zara, to progress to the first round of the competition. 8 pairs now compete to progress to the second round of the knockout competition. This competition is trialling the new Advantage Golf handicap system and players are curious and somewhat apprehensive about how the new system will compare with the current 'extra strokes' system.

Editor: Initially I welcomed the new Advantage Golf Croquet system, having totally forgotten to take my extra strokes in the first match I played in a handicap game. And after playing in the All-England Tournament with the new Advantage system, I was 100% in favour of it. However, after a Kenilworth Cup first round match a few days later, that certainty had slipped somewhat and some doubts began to creep in. I am still in favour, but with some unease about it. It would be interesting to hear the opinions of others, from both high and low handicappers, after trialling the system in the Kenilworth Cup, or the All-England Handicap Tournament. An idea for next Running Hoops? If you would like to express your opinion on this, please email to Elizabeth: eythomson@live.co.uk.

Leagues

The leagues continue to be popular and well supported, with 18 members divided into 4 blocks, challenging each other in the first league of the season, and 14 in the second league, competing in 3 blocks. This is now in progress, **with matches to be completed by 12th July**, allowing 6 weeks to accommodate those arranging holidays at this time. Thanks are due to Mike Cheeseman for organising the leagues quietly and efficiently.

Editor: I know I keep repeating myself, but I am so impressed with, and so grateful for, the willingness of so many people to contribute to these newsletters. It reinforces what a lovely group of people make up our club and how easy it makes my job of assembling all the material into a newsletter. So once again, huge thanks to the new writers, Edith, Bob, Cliff, and Philip Wood, the Committee members who submit their stories, and to the established journalists who contribute regularly, issue after issue.

And as ever, my thanks to Ian for circulating Running Hoops, to Glen for taking photographs for me while I was competing in the Doubles Fun Day, and to those who sent me their own photographs of events, when I got so engrossed in other activities, I simply forgot, or missed the opportunity, to take the pictures I needed for Running Hoops: Nick for Budleigh Salterton clubhouse, Jan for the Charlecote Cup photographs and Adrian for the Open Day pictures. Memory's a great thing!
