

Through the **HOOOP**

With Tony Antenen

.... A welcome visitor from "Down Under"

.... 1995 membership subscriptions, an important note from the Secretary
.... the '94 AGM and Seasonal Greetings from the Engine Room!!!

During a busy end-of-Season period we received a welcome visit from Colonel (Ret'd) A.T. (Tony) Hall OBE, President, Croquet Players Association of New South Wales who updated me on changes of personnel and provided copies of their comprehensive Fixtures List for 1995 (which, incidentally, carries through from January to December!!). Any of you more fortunate people undertaking a winter get-away-from-it-visit to NSW who would like contact names and telephone numbers get in touch with me here at the CA Office, I can assure you of a (literally) warm welcome.

Now! On a more serious note. This is the time of year when the Magazine contains a drop-on-your-boots sheet detailing the 1995 subscription rates and incorporating a form for completion and return along with your cheque. This year, because of the delays in publication - for whatever reasons - it has been decided to do an all-Association Members mail shot so as to ensure that you, Dear Reader, receive the necessary documen-

tation in plenty of time bearing in mind the savings that can be made by early payment. Consequently, even as you read this you should already be in possession of the necessary form and if you are not please alert us here at HQ. The

I am thinking of commissioning a painting on the lines of Bateman entitled "The manager who asked see the Member's card" with some purple-faced member about to explode at such effrontery!

good news is that, for 1995, CA individual Association Membership rates remain unchanged. What greater incentive do you need to send your cheques winging to an appreciative Secretary??!

A brief word about the CA Membership Card. (Environmentally green this year). Perhaps not all of you know that your card is produced in-house here at the Office at a fraction of the costs which would be incurred were we to opt for a commercially produced "smart" card and by far the vast majority of members support this approach if the feedback we have had is anything to go by.

We are constrained as to card dimensions by the facilities to hand but it can be scissored to fit the average sized card holder without much difficulty. (I am thinking of commissioning a painting on the lines of Bateman entitled "The

manager who asked see the Member's card" with some purple-faced member about to explode at such effrontery!) Last words on this subject: your 1995 card will be sent as soon as the associated documentation (handicap cards, fixture book) is ready, hopefully mid-January.

The 1994 AGM held here at Hurlingham in October was attended by some 60 Members all told. A full report of the proceedings will be published in a subsequent edition of the magazine and I would draw your attention in advance to both Colin Irwin's Report as retiring Chairman and the President's Closing

Address both of which contain 'food for thought' and both ask - and answer - some pretty basic questions about the Association. A pleasing moment during the meeting was the presentation of the Steele Bowl to Beatrice McGlen of Bretby as the most improved lady player. Congratulations! (Peter Taylor of Bowdon is to receive the Apps-Heley award at Bowdon later this year).

Finally, writing on a darkling day in drear November we here at the Office with no more than a cursory glance behind us at 1994 prepare for 1995. From all of us here, that is from Paul Champion who has settled into the driving seat of the main computer and has, in addition, provided wide ranging support right across the board; from Marie De Laurey, our Girl-Friday who has regularly provided that invaluable extra pair of hands just when they were most needed with special thanks for riding shotgun on the issue of the '94 Club Registration Pack; from Brian Mac, now happily well recovered after his spell in hospital, with his undiminished energy and enthusiasm, and from your Secretary all our very best wishes and Seasonal Greetings.

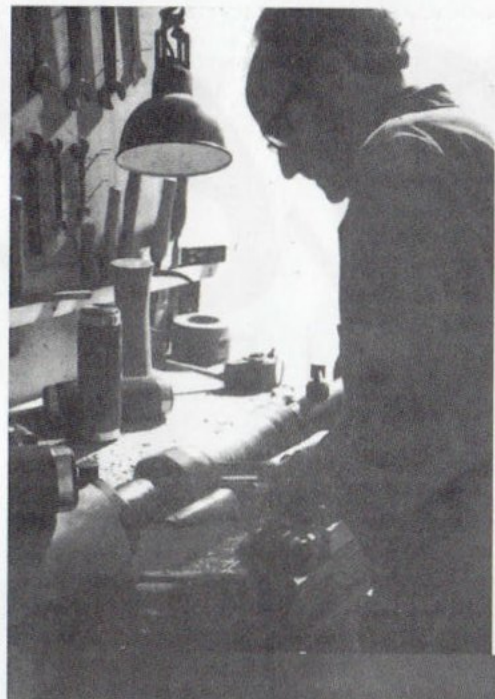
Croquet

MAGAZINE ISSUE 236

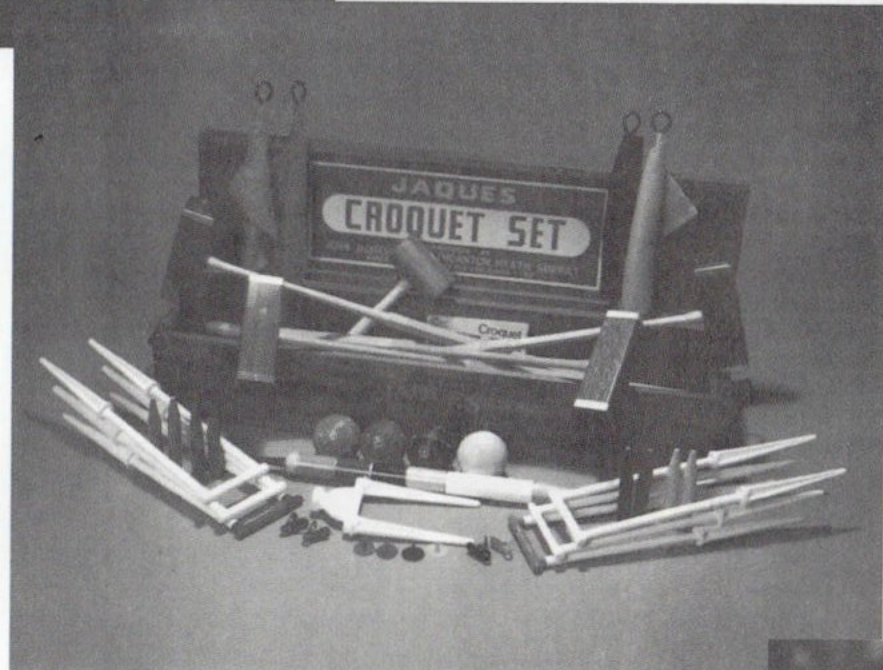


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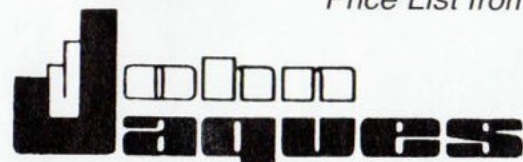


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croquet

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the croquet silverware.

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*Tony Antenen is visited by a stranger from down-under
and reminds us that it's time to pay up!*

The National Croquet League 1995

Next year the CA has decided to run an experimental national league. The top division of the league will be national, with the lower divisions becoming progressively more regionalised.

Where possible the leagues will consist of six teams and each team will be made up of four players. The matches will be played under advanced play rules and will consist of two doubles games in the morning and four singles in the afternoon.

Full details of the league have been sent to your club secretary, however in the letter there was an unfortunate ambiguity: "The matches will be played on

individual days, not over weekends". To clarify the situation, matches will be played on either Saturdays, Sundays or Bank Holidays but no match will be spread over more than 1 day. Because of this error and the need for some clubs to hold Committee meetings before entering, the closing date for entries has been extended to 31st January 1995.

So if you think that your club should enter the league contact him/her today. It is hoped that the league will appeal to teams at all levels, from those who have just started playing advanced right through to the top clubs in the country.

1994 World Croquet Championship

By now, many readers will already know that the World Championship, held at Cardeb Park in August, was a great success. England's Robert Fulford returned from his professional Odyssey to successfully defend his title. We hope to have a full report

soon.

Brian MacMillan's Croquet Shop moved north temporarily and did the usual excellent business for the CA. New recruit Liz Taylor-Webb added some glamour to the operation and Syd Jones added a North-East accent!



OBITUARIES

Nora Elvey

I first met Mrs Elvey (it was not until I had known her for many years that I felt emboldened to call her Nora) when I joined the Compton Croquet Club in 1971, long after the zenith of her playing years. Although I didn't realize it at the time she was then aged 73, still going the rounds of tournaments and enjoying her croquet to the full. Her associations with Compton went right back to 1928 when she first started playing under the tutelage of her formidable husband the Reverend George Frederick Handel Elvey (whose books are still an excellent introduction for beginners). She rose to the top level and clocked up an impressive record of major titles. She was immensely proud of her husband's contributions to the game and throughout her career insisted on being styled Mrs G F H Elvey: woe betide the manager who listed her as Mrs N Elvey!

But to me, a green newcomer to English croquet in 1971, she with her slightly reserved and totally unpretentious manner, seemed indistinguishable from the dozens of

other lady players who graced the Compton lawns and I had no idea of her history. Slowly, with growing amazement and deepening respect, it dawned on me that this sweet little lady with virtually no backswing and a dizzyingly crooked follow-through, could not only play the game, but was a cunning tactician setting all sorts of traps for the unwary (me!). She tentatively offered advice on break-making and leaves, and gently berated when chances for peeling finishes were either missed or muffed through ill thought out play. Her pleasure at witnessing my very first triple peel (in a club friendly) was intoxicating and contagious!

On the lawns she was a diminutive, slight figure, invariably dressed in a two-piece suit of a darkish hue: in fact, in keeping with most of the croquet ladies of her generation, I don't think that I ever saw her in whites. She and Compton's long-time president Barbara Chittenden, herself a first class player, were always to be seen together. They would often arrive in Mrs Elvey's bright red

MG 1100 GT, wherein they would also eat their packed lunch whilst watching play.

Having known and played all the great players of the last 70 years, she loved to recall past tournaments, especially Devonshire Park where she had been one of the regulars for as long as anyone else could remember. She had a sharp memory and a happy way with words which brought these deeds from yesteryear to life. Now, sadly, she too is part of that history, but surely remembered by all who encountered her with great affection.

Roger Wood

Although Nora Elvey who died recently at the age of 96 will be remembered by no more than a handful of Associates, it would be remiss to leave her passing unrecorded in CROQUET. In her playing career which spanned the 1939-45 War she achieved considerable success, of which the following is a brief summary: four President's Cup appearances (1947,] 948, 1954, & 1959), finishing joint runner-up on the second occasion; Women's

Championship winner twice (1947 & 1948); seventeen appearances in the Ladies Field Cup (now the Barlow Bowl), and the holder in 1936 of the Doubles Championship in the company of her husband, Handel, who was largely instrumental in her rising to top class level. And this in an era when the number of women A-class players was vastly greater than, sadly, today's scanty numbers.

Her strokes were careful and clean and her tactics impeccable. Like Kitty Sessions (Wheeler), six years her junior and one inch shorter, she proved that it is neither height nor strength nor youth that makes a croquet ball travel fast and true. As we remember her, Nora had a very placid disposition, self-effacing and the last to crow over her prowess. She was particularly kind to new players and would say: "You did- In her later days Nora was much in demand as a Tournament Manager and Referee; she was probably the best post-war referee of croquet strokes but she never adopted the 1961 total rewrite of the Law Book out of loyalty to Handel who had been

an architect of the laws for nearly 60 years. Her diplomacy in dealing with a flaming row between Humphrey Hicks and Bobby Wiggins (due to the non-appearance of the latter at the scheduled time for the semi-final!) at the Open Championship in 1965 is remembered with admiration.

S.S.T. E.A.M.P.

In her later years Nora was often to be seen at Compton with a handbag which always seemed abnormally heavy. On being questioned by a curious croquet player she would explain that she always took a heavy hammer with her to tournaments so that she could attend promptly to any badly adjusted hoops on the lawns. In this respect she was like the formidable Baroness Platt of Writtle, Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, educationalist and distinguished aeronautical engineer who, we are told, always carries a screwdriver in her handbag which she has been known to use to deal with such recalcitrant pieces of machinery as she encounters in her public life.

D.W.S. A.J.O.

At last - Croquet gets a season-long league system

EDITING AND PRODUCTION of CROQUET

From time to time the CA reviews the arrangements for the editing and production of 'Croquet'. Such a review will take place in the New Year and applications are invited from anyone who is interested in editing and/or taking responsibility for the production of the magazine with effect from April 1st, 1995. A small honorarium is paid for these duties.

Interested parties should in the first instance contact in writing or by telephone:

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SAE

Humour required in croquet; Controversy over balls escalates

National Merit Award Scheme

Dear John,
There seems to be little point in running an award scheme now, if no one is getting rewarded.

When I achieved my Bronze, many years ago, I received a congratulatory letter and my medal within TWO WEEKS.

Cynthia Street, a Ramsgate Club Member, achieved her Bronze in MAY 1994 and has still not received her Medal. Even after two letters to Chris Clarke and one to the C.A. Secretary. This is not good enough!

I dispatched my Silver Award Card to Chris on the 7th August 1994 and I too have heard nothing.

This is not the way to encourage people to join the C.A. or an incentive for members to improve their play. I am beginning to think it is becoming a means for the C.A. to get a load of SAE for future use, or is someone steaming the stamps off?

If the present incumbent hasn't got the good manners to inform winners of a delay, for what ever reason, then I suggest he is replaced immediately.

I hope you can find room for this in the Magazine as I am sure there are a lot of other unhappy, neglected award winners out there.

Yours sincerely,
Len Hawkins

Many thanks

Dear John,
I would like to thank all those members that sent me Cards and Messages of Get Well during my recent spell in Hospital. I am pleased to say I am now back in harness and that the "Croquet Shop" is open all hours.

We have a good selection of Equipment, Mallets, Books to suit the Beginner right up to the



Class "A" player, also Wet suits, ties. Contact me at the CA Office.

Many thanks & best wishes
Brian C MacMillan

Can You 'HELP'

Dear John
In 1993 Mike Evans of the Beverley club in Yorkshire published a guide to the croquet clubs in the north of England, entitled 'Help' (the Humorous guide to Enlighten Lost croquet Players). During the next few months both Mike and myself are hoping to rewrite the guide to include all clubs in Britain & Ireland.

Section 1 of the book will concentrate on clubs who hold tournaments advertised in the C.A. fixture book. The information we are trying to compile for such a section will cover club details, directions to the clubs, recommended local accommodation, recommended places to eat, the all important pub guide and any other information players might find useful or amusing. Section 2 will cover all other existing clubs to give details of their locality, facilities and who to contact if you fancy a game should you find yourself in the area.

If you have stayed, eaten, drunk, found something of interest to visit, or just have an amusing story to tell and would like to share your knowledge with other players, please get in touch with either Mike Evans - Tel. 0482 882936 or Gail Curry - Tel. 091 2579045.

All of your recommendations would be most welcome and we will acknowledge all contributors. Please note that any named party will be contacted to gain their approval of a story concerning them before inclusion in the book.

Yours sincerely
Gail Curry

"I am beginning to think it is becoming a means for the C.A. to get a load of SAE for future use"

From the Handicap Co-ordination Committee

Dear John,
With reference to Christine Irwin's analysis of full-bisque handicap games (issue 232) showing that the better players seem to have an advantage, Geoffrey Cuttle has shown the HCC a histogram of bisque-difference games played at Woking over several years revealing a similar tendency. As in Christine's survey, many of these games pre-date introduction of the AHS.

Further, an analysis of more than 500 bisque-difference games played at various tournaments last year, although not as exhaustive as that for full-bisque games, shows the same effect. For example, players with handicaps of 16 or over won only 44% of their games, which is in line with Christine's results. However, in both forms of play the AHS will act to correct any bias, although there is no guarantee that the result will be a linear system.

The problem would appear to be mainly that of the handicapping of high-bisquers and handicappers should beware of introducing them to tournament play at too low a handicap.

The arguments used by Margaret Jones in her original letter (Issue 224) were incomplete and her conclusions erroneous. There is, I think, a general lack of understanding of the theory of handicapping, and I shall return to this point in a later article if the Editor permits the space.

The important point for now is that players and particularly high-bisquers should not be deterred from playing full-bisque games.

Yours faithfully,
Bill Lamb

Grateful for plugs?

Dear John
All authors must be grateful for any 'plugs' which their works receive but, at the risk of seeming to 'plug' the works further, I should like to correct one or two inaccuracies in your review.

First, the statement that the paperback edition of Croquet: The Skills of the Game still contains 'the famous "roquet distance v odds" graph that tells us of a handicap +2's 50% (critical distance) record on 20 yard roquets' was so startling that I was driven to look at the graph again myself. Nowhere on the graph or in the accompanying text is there any mention of handicap; nor is there any reason why there should be, for there is no direct connection between handicap and shooting ability. In fact, if your reviewer had read the text, he would have realised that the topmost curve refers to the best shots who might hit the peg when shooting from a side boundary with one shot in two and, therefore, on a level lawn have a critical distance of 20 yards. You have my permission to reproduce the graph with its accompanying text.

Second, as I made clear in the introduction, the book was not written for beginners and should not be recommended to them; it contains far too much for a book for beginners and is likely to be confusing. Likewise, it was never intended as a replacement for 'The World of Croquet', although it is from the same publisher. Instead, it was written as a book for those who have passed the beginner stage and are realistic enough to recognise that they are unlikely to

become experts, but would still like to improve their game; in other words the vast majority of players. That is why the triple peel is dismissed in a couple of paragraphs and readers are referred to 'The World of Croquet' and 'Expert Croquet Tactics'.

'Know the Game: Croquet' was originally written by Dr. G.L. Ormerod and later revised by John McCulloch. It will be familiar to many players, as it was for many years the only available book for beginners. The publishers requested an increase in length from 8000 words to 12,000 words for the latest colour edition, which required a re-write rather than a revision. Dr. Ormerod generously ceded the copyright to the Croquet Association and that arrangement still exists. All royalties on sales of the book go to the Croquet Association.

I was amused to see that I am to be a prize for your novel competition. Although I have no intention of writing any further books on croquet, I would be interested to see the entries in order to find out where I have gone wrong.

Yours faithfully,
Bill Lamb

New Southwick format

The format of the 82nd Summer Tournament 1995 at 'Southwick' has been altered slightly (June 26th - July 1st) to include Advanced play in the Class Singles Event, as well as Advanced/Handicap Advanced and Handicap. There will be 3 trophies provided, including the beautiful Maurice Reckitt Bowl. The Doubles Event remains as before, run as a Swiss.

An additional Event



has been formulated, Unrestricted Handicap Singles, run as Swiss or Egyptian, for which game lengths may be shortened. This will take place in the late afternoons or evenings, and a trophy will be given. Thus everyone will be able to enjoy as much Croquet as they wish into the long summer evenings!

At the moment the lawns are undergoing their winter treatment to keep them up to excellent standard, and shortly all but 2 will be closed till April.

As well, the marvelous Winter Working Party volunteers are repairing, painting and generally clearing up in all directions every Tuesday morning - the Club is very fortunate to have so much expertise willingly offered. The Pavilion is gradually being restored, and another phase is under way.

Having had a very busy 1994, 'Southwick' is already preparing and looking forward to a successful and enjoyable 1995!

See you there!

Yours sincerely,
Diana Brothers, S.C.C.C.

Luddites?

Dear Sir,
Control-line model aircraft flying was great fun and involved travelling around the country entering aerobic competitions. We built our own models and would sometimes design them. Tuning our engines, reading all we could, and flying our socks off was a full time occupation during the height of the season.

As rookies it was all ahead of us with the dream of one day being able to fly consistently well, but, when we started to get into the big-time (3rd or 4th

places) the dreaming was buried beneath the moaning and wingeing that so often goes hand in hand with the disappointed competitor. Various excuses could be heard from the flight lines ranging from poor judging to poor weather. It was these thoughts that re-emerged when I read David Carpenter's letter in the October issue of this magazine.

David argues that Barlow croquet balls present the player with a few problems not experienced with Jaques balls, and continues to suggest that clubs and competitors should steer clear of them. I'm sure he is right in stating that the rush shot differs, that the pull is much stronger, and that cut rushes could cause concern to players not used to Barlows. But does it really matter when it is the same for everyone? Players adjust to varying circumstances; the slow or fast lawn, the humps and hollows, the sloping lawns, the match perfect set of Jaques balls and the rough set of Jaques balls with damaged surface and bits missing.

If you start the game with the belief that the balls are going to be a problem then they will be - and you will lose. Barlow balls exist and are here to stay, and I would suggest that all tournament players acquire a set, either through their club or privately, and put in a few hours practice.

My own club (Northampton) has gone over to Barlow's simply on cost. Basically, they are better value for money because they last longer at around half the price of Jaques. Now, surely, any Northampton member playing away from home with Jaques could feel as equally disadvantaged as those players represented in David's letter. But, of

"I'm sure he is right in stating that the rush shot differs, that the pull is much stronger, and that cut rushes could cause concern to players not used to Barlows"

LETTERS

course, we don't, even though the pull, the rush, the cut, the feel, the sound, and even the colour are not what we are used to. We are too busy getting on with the job of trying to overcome our adversaries and not our prejudices.

Moving away from croquet let us consider the plight of today's tennis players having to adjust to the various surfaces now on offer: shale, clay, all weather, tarmac, plastic, astro-turf; and that's before we mention grass. These surfaces all produce a different game and make the ball bounce and skid with great variation. I am only an occasional player but I've never heard a tennis player moaning about the courts to any degree.

A further point to note here is what must Barlows think when they read a letter in the Croquet magazine that advises all players to avoid their product like the plague (incidentally, I have absolutely no financial interest or otherwise in Barlows



whatsoever)? A minority interest game like ours needs all the support it can get. For all we know Barlows are on the brink of closing up shop for the croquet fraternity and investing all this effort into some other activity. If club committees throughout the game took David's advice they would be forced to - and that would result in increased subs for all club members now using Barlows.

So I say to all those who fear Barlow balls, put a bit more faith in the CA officials who approved them, put in some practice, and remember that the proof of the pudding is not how the players feel about the balls, but do Barlow balls produce a decent and fair game with a smile on the face of the winner presumably, someone did win at Hunstanton?

Yours sincerely,
N. Evans

Dear Sir,
I write in reply to

David Carpenter's letter published in Issue No 235, October 1994, concerning the behaviour of Barlow Balls.

Parkstone purchased its Barlow Balls in 1989 and until the 1994 season had no cause to question this decision. We began to notice a problem with their performance around June when the weather became extremely hot.

We monitored the balls closely for the rest of the season and observed that in very hot weather their performance was markedly different than we were used to. We questioned our own players and visitors and noted their comments, many of their remarks concur with David's observations.

After long and detailed discussion the Parkstone Croquet Committee decided to purchase 12 new sets of Jaques balls for future Tournament play. We have noted this fact in our entries in the fixture book for 1995 in the hope that nobody will be put off coming to

Parkstone because they do not like Barlow balls, not least David himself who will always be welcome here.

Yours faithfully,
John Simmonds
Chairman, Croquet Section
- EDLT&CC

Dear John,
David Carpenter's 'experience' of Barlow balls (October issue) is incredible. On which planet has he been testing them? He tells of a Barlow ball invariably jumping when it hits another and that rushed balls go off in a direction different to their line of centres. He has clearly found a way of defying the laws of physics.

I will concede that Barlows have more pull than Jaques - but this is not because of their composition; it is because they generally have more milling left on them!

The few Jaques balls that survive cracking, surface flaking and becoming misshapen generally last about three seasons before being worn almost smooth. At one of my clubs, Winchester, we have been playing with the same four sets of Barlows that were bought in 1989. None are damaged and the wear is equivalent to 1 - 1 1/2 seasons of Jaques.

Neither do we find them like 'Christmas puddings', regularly sticking in hoops. For the Winchester One-Ball Championship hoops were set at 1/32nd of an inch, it was played in searing heat and the standard of hoop running was admirable.

I shall explain why clubs are switching from Jaques to Barlows. Most players find little or no difference in how they play but expenditure on balls is reduced by 80 - 90 %.

Yours sincerely,
Kevin Carter

Dear John,
SPHERICAL OBJECTS. Or words to that effect, without being rude. In commenting on David Carpenter's letter in Issue No. 235, of course there's a difference in Jaques and Barlow balls! Durability and Price mainly both in Barlow's favour. Clubs like Ramsgate just cannot afford to change a set of Jaques balls every time one of the matched sets gets chipped. We were buying at least one set a year to maintain our eight sets used only in two weekend CA Tournaments and about eight League Matches a season. Since changing to Barlows we have used the same sets for Club and Tournament play for the past two years without requiring a single replacement.

In David's article he illustrated the difference in pull and mentioned the difference in "rushability". If these factors were known, why wasn't it compensated for in the stroke? Anyone can adjust to a constant variable but you cannot adapt for a "kick" due to a chipped or cracked ball! Us lesser likes rarely get the opportunity to play with a brand new set of Jacques Balls and if they are so accurate why was the hoop setting law changed, before the onset of Barlow Balls, to using the LARGEST BALL - IN A MATCHED SET??

In Tennis and Badminton you rarely get either the same bounce on a ball or flight of a shuttlecock at various venues due to any number of circumstances ie surface, temperature, humidity, winds or draughts. The better the player the more rapidly they adapt their game to suit.

Is David inferring that Croquet Players are of a lesser breed and that we must cosset these "A"

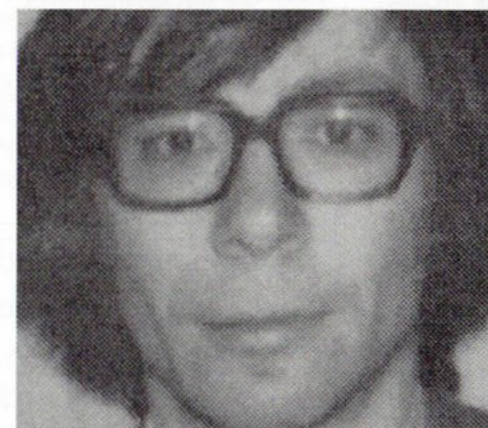
players so that they have ample excuses for losing? I thought they were complaining that the game was getting too easy. Maybe they should be made to play with a mixed set - Blue & Red Jacques, Black & Yellow Barlow - that would sort the men from the boy!

The old saying still goes - "ITS A POOR WORKMAN WHO BLAMES HIS TOOLS". I hope you can find room for this in the Magazine as I am sure there are lots of other happy Barlow Bashers out there.

Yours sincerely,
Len Hawkins
Hon Treasurer RCC

Omission

Dear John,
We are writing to make amends for the glaring omission for some considerable time from 'Croquet' of the name of Rick Davis. Rick is one of those solid, salt-of-the-earth types who takes his croquet very seriously, and who is deeply hurt that his achievements never quite warrant a mention in print. Looking back through old issues, we are at pains to find any photographic portrayal of the man said by some to be the very embodiment of that most British of characteristics, perseverance. Although he may be greying at the temples now, we feel he probably has a couple of



seasons of reasonable croquet left in him before he is finally put out to grass. The enclosed photograph shows him in his prime.

Yours sincerely,
David Carpenter and
Beatrice McGlen

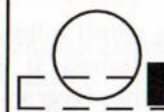
Did you score?

Dear John,
I have twice been involved in the playing situation shown in the attached sketch. On one occasion the referee ruled that I could score a point legally by tapping the ball through the hoop from its present position. On another, I was told that I could not score a point because the ball at no time had entered the jaws of the hoop from the playing side.

Law 14 says a ball scores a point "by passing through" (underlining mine) the hoop. The question, therefore, is: has this ball passed through the hoop when it has not traversed the first line of the jaws area?

Can you (or someone else who can interpret the finer points of the Laws) give me the correct ruling?

PLAYINGSIDE



NON-PLAYINGSIDE

On a previous turn my opponent knocked the black ball into the jaws of the hoop from this side, leaving it to come to rest as shown.

At no time did the ball enter the "hoop area" from the playing side.

QUESTION: As this is black's next hoop, do I score a point if I run the hoop from the ball's present position, or is the ball required to run the whole of the hoop to count as a point?

Sincerely
James Mays

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I'm sure that gambling can't be new to croquet - the same is absolutely made for it and I wouldn't mind betting that, over the years, more than a few quid has changed hands on the result of a match. What convinces me of this is seeing old photographs of Croquet matches in which the lawns are thronged with eager spectators. And what are they doing there? Could they have been forced against their collective will to attend perhaps? No, of course not. It's obvious that they have all got money riding on the result of the game. It's the only thing I can think of which accounts for the huge disparity between the crowds of yesteryear and the meagre handful of casual onlookers at today's events,

Let me straightaway reassure those who would hold gambling to be a corrupting influence which might leave players open to manifest temptations, that the

Look what gambling has done for 'the Sport of Kings': horse racing would be pretty pointless without it

the marbles to leave just one in the middle - the result is never in doubt for very Long.

So what better way to increase spectator interest than by introducing an element of risk and uncertainty? Look what gambling has done for 'the Sport of Kings': horse racing would be pretty pointless without it. And for cricket, yes cricket! The West Indian spectators I've seen at cricket matches know how to enjoy the game - by gambling on the result of almost every delivery, why can't Croquet do the same?

New millennium

Let the doubters amongst you look to

on a white horse single-handedly holds the crowd in check as the last ball is pegged off.

The coffee pram cometh

But let us draw back for a moment from these dizzying sights to a real day at the very end of September when the finals of the Longman Cup and Mary Rose were held in the rain at Cheltenham. I was one of only a very few spectators and was there only because Ipswich had been knocked out at the semi-final stage the day before and me and the team were kicking our heels for a bit before setting out on the long journey home. By the time the coffee pram had done the rounds our numbers had been doubled by the arrival of four more spectators all of whom, I noticed, were well supplied with the weekend papers and crossword puzzles. Admittedly it was pretty soggy but here we were at the

that we were All on his side for he looked up, smiled and waved cheerily to what he thought was a group of his supporters, I must apologize to him, whoever he was, because the raw truth of the matter was that a fiver had just changed hands on the result of his shot. He can console himself, however, with the thought that he may well go down in history as having contributed in no small measure to the tide of enthusiasm which subsequently swept through the ranks of our proud island's sports fans. As if to prove the significance of the moment a tote sprang up spontaneously among the crowd, odds were offered on the next long hit in, someone produced a blackboard and chalk and at the far side of lawn 8 a tick-tack man appeared mysteriously (some later said he had descended) and started to signal odds to the club house.

The 'Chicken hoop', as I like to call it, could even become Croquet's equivalent of pulling off the 'double'

that vital knowledge about form comes into its own. For many it also represents one of the spiciest moments in the game offering the really serious Croquet gambler the additional piquancy of the 'Chicken' factor, that psychological dimension which to many makes this the connoisseur's choice of bet. Indeed some of the embryo croquet gamblers at Cheltenham preferred to wait for the chance to savour this rare event and on such occasions it was not unknown for considerable quantities of money to change hands. The 'Chicken hoop', as I like to call it, could even become Croquet's equivalent of pulling off the 'double' in horse racing 'three to one he goes for the hoop, then two

dice in Backgammon sets which nobody knows what to do with. It might also be a good idea to follow Casino practice and make chips available which could be cashed in by spectators at the end of a tournament.

The future is here

Finally, if anyone yet remains to be convinced, the benefits of such a scheme to both player profile and the circulation figures of our beloved magazine are obvious. No longer would letters appear complaining about the amount of space allocated to top players but such material would be actively sought so that gamblers could study form. People would start reading reports of tournaments in which they themselves were not actually involved for much the same reason. Indeed I can predict with some confidence that there will come a time when Bookie's runners

Richard Leaf

THE GAMBLERS GUIDE ...

suggestions which follow do not touch upon them. Indeed, it is my steadfast opinion that the player should at all times be protected from such evil influences as might lead him to stray from the paths of honesty which happily guide his feet as he threads his balls from hoop to hoop. No, I wish merely to outline a scheme to enliven a game which, whilst being splendid to play, is widely accepted as being utterly devoid of spectator interest.

A lot of knowledge is a dangerous thing

The strange thing about Croquet from the spectator's point of view is that the more you understand what is going on the more boring it becomes to watch. It's rather like watching someone playing solitaire - that game where you have to remove all

the future for a moment. Imagine a time, perhaps at the beginning of the new millennium, when croquet lawns are once more lined with spectators; when the excited buzz of a crowd drops away to hushed anticipation as all ante-hoop-one bets cease and the first ball is played onto the lawn; when clubs can charge gate money while the C.A. appoints its first full-time bailiffs to collect its cut; when bar takings have soared and catering franchises abound; and when, at some far off future date, the final of the Secretary's shield is held at Wemb-er-ley and a lone policeman

hen the excited buzz of a crowd drops away to hushed anticipation as all ante-hoop-one bets cease

finals of two national competitions and the 'crowd' numbered just eight people, Pitiful! However, it may turn out that the fates had conspired to bring together at Cheltenham Croquet Club that day a small but select group of enthusiasts; people of rare spirit and vision. And one day, who knows, a Cheltenham committee may be able to boast that it was beneath their ancient and glorious hut awnings that Gambling was reintroduced to the game and that theirs was the venue for an event which was to have far reaching consequences for the 'Game of Queens',

Tick tack toe

Midway through the morning a poor player was seen to be startled by an enormous cheer that went up when he hit in across the lawn. He must have thought

... TO CROQUET

Place your bets

As anyone who stops to think for a moment will quickly realize, the game abounds with opportunities for gambling and they are limited only by the imagination of the gambler. The likely outcome of the long hit in is the most obvious and perhaps most spectacular example as we have already noticed but the take off across the lawn also proved quite popular at Cheltenham as the occasion for a flurry of betting activity: would it go off the lawn? (10 to 1), would it get within three feet of the target ball? (5 to 1), would the player hit or miss the ensuing roquet? (evens). And of course there's hoop running - best left until a nicely angled hoop is to be attempted or until the player under scrutiny is faced with a six foot pot shot; here too is where

to one he misses it, or something like that.

Fluffy dice

Of course, if this sort of thing were to become a regular feature at croquet tournaments some thought will have to be given to its implications for management and administration. I suggest that a tournament bookie be appointed to handle the gambling side of events and that large fluffy 'Hilditchian' dice be provided at the side of each lawn for the recording of odds during a game - rather like that strange

I suggest that a tournament bookie be appointed to handle the gambling side of events

will be found hanging around the C.A. office ready to snatch their copies of 'Croquet' hot from the press; when every street corner will support its Croquet tipster and Radio Four will announce each morning, not racing tips for Cheltenham but Croquet tips,

Sketchy as these plans may be I hope they might generate some debate during the enforced winter lay-off and that next season might see the start of a new and radical approach to the problem of dwindling Croquet crowds. Out there somewhere I know there is a club bold enough to take Croquet forward to where no club has been before; let them stand forth and lead us in our search to recapture those golden days when crowds jostled shoulder to shoulder at the edge of the lawn and the gentleman gambler would risk his all on the run of a single hoop.

THE EMOTICON

Roy Wallis

Another import from America is the emoticon. It enables you to illustrate your thoughts via your home word processor. To view it, rotate the page a quarter-turn clockwise.

The Morning After

George had had a bad night. He had drunk several whiskies too many during the evening and he felt like death <@r. He was due to play a handicap singles match today. He remembered the manager from last year. It was that tall, thin retired analytical chemist with a silly little beard :-(-. The wretched man had given George a roasting in front of everybody for turning up half an hour late for one of his games :-0=. He recalled how embarrassed he had felt :-*, especially as Liz had been within earshot. Though she was a smoker and he was not, he thought she was the most sophisticated girl he had ever met 30v↑.

Lost Cause

He remembered also from last year losing every match in the tournament. There was that thick-set, cocky man with a military moustache :-|, who dominated their first-round game. He later heard that the man was a corporal in the army >>. In the Y, he was beaten by a quiet man in a bow tie :-)X - an astronomer he was told 0*. In the doubles, he and that dumpy Mrs Trimble (the one with the fancy hemline) oO≠ had been trounced by the man with a wide gap in his teeth the image of Terry-Thomas) :-|θ and his partner, a rather loud lady with a lot to say ↔d/∧. Then, in his class he had lost to the small man who looked like Inspector Taggart xO). the result was not a little affected by the

fly that got into his eye and irritated him for the rest of the day ;-(. He didn't expect to do much better this year. His vibrating head would do nothing to help §.

All Talk

As he arrived at the club, he could see his opponent talking to Liz :-o, who seemed a little bored 3:α - or was he just being hopeful? The game started on time, and George won the toss δ~. He started and soon got his yellow going. Though he had four bisques ≡, there was a nasty moment when he only just made hoop 5. and had to call a referee to judge it. The referee ruled it through, but he could see his opponent was still in some doubt :-T. He had to take a bisque to roquet \≡, but made 6 all right, though he had to shoot his red ⊆ into the second corner to get behind the pioneer at l-back.

A Dog's life

It was while he was occupied in the corner L that he fancied he heard a chuckle behind him. He played the stop-shot and as he looked up he saw that the 2-back hoop had been pulled out of the ground and was just lying there Π. His opponent was sitting by the court with a smirk on his face :-,. He asked his opponent what had happened and was told that a stray dog had run on to the lawn while his back was turned and uprooted the hoop. George was absolutely sure that this was a tongue-in-cheek answer from his opponent :-j, and was furious >:-&, but he called the Tournament Referee to replace the hoop and continued.

Personal Problems

Liz had come to see what the

unaccustomed activity was about and he thought she looked a little sad 3:-(- especially when his opponent winked at her '-). It was quite plain that the man was trying to drive a wedge between them Δ. He decided to put it out of his mind and concentrate fully on his game :-#. At 4-back, he knew there was a slight hill, and when he took off from the black behind the hoop, he allowed for his yellow to roll around to a good position @. He went to the peg with yellow and laid up. He was pleased with the break, not least because he hadn't needed to take any of his three remaining bisques ≡.

Here Boy

His opponent hit in and also got a break going, but, taking off for the pioneer at l-back, he overran the hoop and wired himself %. George suggested that he call the mischievous dog to remove the hoop :-D, and he was gratified to see Liz smiling at his little joke 3:-). His opponent was so discomfited, in fact, that he played an air shot : in trying not to leave a target. George decided to trickle up to his opponent's ball and use a bisque to get his break going, but even this was unnecessary as his red ⊆ just made contact with the black %o. His only mistake in the ensuing break was to fail to clear hoop 3 sufficiently to hit his yellow beside the hoop °p, but he took one of his bisques =|, and continued, completing the peg-out to win the game +. His happiness was complete when Liz rewarded him with a kiss 3:-x His opponent looked a bit shattered Σ→↓ and went off crossly to complain to the manager :-|, but George had lost his hangover, and later - much later - there were quite a few more kisses :-x :-x :-x :-x behind the groundsman's hut ←.

Variations in HANDICAP

Play

There has been significant correspondence in 'Croquet' about different methods for handicap play, particularly full bisque play, and this is a frequent topic of discussion between spectators and players drawing bisques at tournaments.

Proposals for debate by Geoffrey Cuttle

The topic was also raised at the AGM this year, when it was pointed out that higher bisquers (who were meant to benefit) tended to prefer the normal difference game. This article attempts to analyse the various issues that have been raised, to consider the implications for players, and to suggest a sensible way forward as a basis for future debate.

What's the Difference

First, the issues. Normal Difference Handicap Play gives bisques according to the difference between players' handicaps and this is still the most frequently played variation. A few years ago Full Bisque Handicap Play was introduced, in which both players receive bisques according to the difference between their handicap and the 'base' (unless one player is below the base) and different bases have been advocated with scratch and 6 most commonly used. More recently, Advanced Handicap Play appeared, with either Difference or Full Bisques (to various bases) being made available but played according to the Rules for Advanced Play with bisque turns interpreted as continuations of the original turn so that lifts and contacts are not affected.

All of these variations have been experimented with in occasional club events, and have been introduced, often as an option, in some tournament events although normal Difference Handicaps have still predominated. All of the variations have their advocates, and there is much debate (generally between low bisquers) as to which is better for high bisquers, and also whether the variations have the same effect on the automatic

handicapping system as the normal system. Although The All England has been used to try out opinions, and it has been demonstrated theoretically that handicaps confer equal benefits regardless of base, most of the opinions expressed are anecdotal and, where statistics have been quoted, they have tended to cover only one or two variations so do not provide a proper basis for rigorous analysis.

Indeed the only consistent comment on handicapping at tournaments is that something has to be done about 'bandits'

Furthermore, every participant in the discussion is biased by their own experience (generally of only some of the variations) and by their own personal skills which inevitably make some variations more attractive than others. With so many variations and so many differences between players it is hardly surprising that the more the debate continues the less a consensus emerges. Indeed the only consistent comment on handicapping at tournaments is that something has to be done about 'bandits', and that is probably only uncontended because the bandits themselves are always in play so never take part in the discussion!

The heart of the Matter

But it is possible to analyse the variations in a rational manner and make logical deductions. The underlying principle is

that the effect of bisques is to reduce the recipient to the level of his own handicap less the number of bisques received. Thus an eighteen playing a ten under the normal Difference Handicap basis receives eight bisques which allow him, to a first approximation, to play as a ten would. So he is as likely to sustain similarly lengths of breaks, using his bisques, as a ten would during the game, and to achieve hit ins, or use his bisques to do so, with equal frequency. Of course he could also squander them all to make an initial all round break (which a ten would be unlikely to succeed), but would then be at a severe disadvantage for his second ball so the balance is maintained, and on average (because of the automatic handicapping system) he is effectively on a par with his opponent. Similarly if he plays a fourteen, receiving four bisques, he can perform to a first approximation as a fourteen. In contrast, if he plays either opponent in a Full Bisque game to base six he receives twelve bisques, they also receive their appropriate bisques, and to a first approximation they should all perform on the lawn very much as an average six should.

Practicalities

The implications of this are important. They mean that a high bisquer, playing only the normal Difference Handicap game, has to play every game at the level of his lower handicap opponent. When he plays a ten, he has to adopt the tactics of a ten, when he plays a fourteen the tactics of the fourteen, and he only has the opportunity to contemplate more substantial breaks when he plays a six or better. In effect the tactics for the higher

Variations in **HANDICAP** Play

Continued from page 13

bisquer vary with every game, whereas a lower bisquer can play the same game most of the time and only has to reassess it when he faces a superior A-class opponent. No wonder the average high bisquer finds the game confusing! Furthermore, if as at present he only occasionally plays the Full Bisque game, that is equally confusing because, with his opponent also receiving bisques, he loses the comfortable cushion that he has become accustomed to when playing better opponents and has to learn yet another variation. This undoubtedly explains much of the scepticism that many higher bisquers feel when told that the Full Bisque game will make life easier for them. It will - but only when they have been taught or have learnt how to play it, as John Solomon pointed out during the discussion at the AGM.

An Ideal World?

Consider the scenario that would apply if all handicap games were played Full Bisque, to the same base. Until he improves, the high bisquer will always receive the same number of bisques (other than on the rare occasions when he meets an opponent below the base), and he can patiently learn how to use them to the best advantage. He can develop consistent game strategies to set up breaks, and then to play breaks, and finally will learn to modify that strategy intelligently according to his own and his opponent's successes and failures. He will learn the importance of positions and breaks, and suffer (because whatever their level his opponents have the same benefits) if he indulges too much in negative Aunt Emma tactics. Moreover, unless both players are totally incompetent, games should seldom go on interminably hoop by occasional hoop.

As the high bisquer improves, he will no longer have to keep learning a new set of tactics. He will still, with his bisques, play effectively to the same base level and he will be using exactly the same strategies as those he has already learnt. He will have to sustain his breaks that little bit more consistently to save those bisques

that his greater competence have taken from him. This is a far more natural progression than that suffered by an improving high bisquer playing the Difference Handicap game who suddenly finds himself bereft of all bisques when playing other high bisquers only marginally worse than himself. In financial terms, the Difference game is excessively highly geared for games between high bisquers.

Setting a Base

This analysis also helps to indicate the proper base level that should be used. The strategy for a high bisquer playing a Full Bisque game will typically use two bisques to set up each break so that at least four and possible six will need to be reserved for that purpose. As his competence, and handicap, improves so will his break play and for a long while he will still rely on those four or so bisques to get in and set up breaks. But eventually he will improve beyond that and then he will have to learn how to set up breaks unaided by bisques. It is only at that stage that a player can really begin to play a reasonable level game properly without bisques, and that will not arise until he can cope reasonably whenever he has a four ball break. Typically (except for bandits) that does not come until the twelve or ten handicap level, so not till then should an improving player be expected to give up those four to six bisques reserved for setting up breaks. All of which suggests that to allow the type of steady improvement proposed the base should be at most eight and probably rather less than that.

There are also constraints the other way. Prima facie, the obvious base for Full Bisque games would be scratch, but consider the implications of this. Once players had become accustomed to it, everyone playing a handicap game would have a competence on the lawn comparable to that of a scratch player, and historically that is known to be an unsatisfactory game that was only resolved by the introduction of the Rules for Advanced Play. It would take time for everyone to learn, but there

can be no doubt that if all handicap games were played Full Bisque to base scratch we would eventually be thoroughly bored by the results. To avoid this, the base needs to be sufficiently high that player's effective competence after bisques was not good enough to kill the fun. This suggests that a minimum base of at least four is needed, and probably slightly higher.

Vive la Full Bisque

So to allow players to improve sufficiently we need a base less than eight, and to prevent the game becoming dull it should be more than four. This points inevitably to a base of six and this (not surprisingly) is the base that has also emerged pragmatically as that most widely favoured by most of those experimenting with the Full Bisque game. I would therefore strongly advocate the use of the Full Bisque game for all events under the rules for Handicap play, and that these games should always be to base six. Further, although for traditional reasons the Difference game should remain in the Laws, I suggest that it should be discouraged for both Tournament and Club events (though still available for Handicap games between experienced players) so that higher bisquers have only one game and one set of strategies that they have to learn.

Shoot the Bandits

What would this approach do about bandits? The two most common complaints of bandits are first that they make breaks beyond their handicap competence and second that their clubs should have done something about them. These complaints give useful clues to the nature of banditry. A tournament may well be the first occasion when a bandit plays a substantial number of games against significantly lower handicap opponents, and thus the first occasion when he regularly receives a generous helping of bisques. If he has reached that level of maturity when he can play a break, once set up, with a reasonable chance of success then those bisques inevitably give him an exceptional advantage. Conversely, if before then his competitive games were generally only against other high bisquers in his club, who probably (recognising his ability) played a somewhat negative Aunt Emma game, then his valiant attempts to make breaks without the bisques to set them up would founder and, despite his growing ability, he would lose enough games under the Automatic Handicap System that his club could not

justify enforcing the reduction that his maturity would otherwise deserve. This explanation could certainly apply to a number of bandits I have observed, and if it is valid then the adoption of the Full Bisque Game would counter it because the moment a player acquired the skill to sustain breaks he would begin to win games regardless of the level and tactics of his opponent and (provided he played some qualifying games) the AHS would immediately start to bring him down to a more appropriate level. He would still, deservedly, win some tournaments but not so outrageously as some bandits do at present.

Getting Advanced

And now what about Advanced Handicap Play? The purpose of this variation is to provide a means for middle bisquers to begin to play and understand the Advanced game. To achieve this, the tactics should mirror those of Level Advanced Play and should not be distorted by the presence of bisques. For example, players should expect to take their first ball to four back and contrive a reasonably elegant leave; should expect the lift shot to be critical; and should expect to take their second ball to the peg and to consider seriously a triple peel in the process. But to do any of those things requires a competence approaching that of a scratch player and a triple is certainly beyond even the most accomplished middle bisquer. So for Advanced Handicap Play to be sensible there must be sufficient bisques to give each player that competence, and (by all the arguments above) this inevitably means that Advanced Handicap should always be played Full Bisque to Base Scratch and no other form should be recognised.

There is one further point about Advanced Handicap Play that affects the Laws. The lift shot, and the various leaves before it, are absolutely critical to the tactics of the game. This was why it was ruled that bisque turns could not be used to negate a lift because otherwise a quite different game would evolve which would no longer satisfy the purpose of the innovation. But, given a full complement of bisques, there is another problem area as well. It would be easy for middle bisquers to keep some bisques in reserve to ensure 100% hit ins on the lift shot and, knowing that, it is likely that players would evolve new leaves for the Advanced Handicap Game that would give away less. This would distort the game in one of its most fascinating areas which cannot be

desirable. I propose that along with the ruling that Advanced Handicap is always played to Base Scratch there should also be a codicil to the Laws (as already played by some clubs) that a bisque cannot be taken to create a hit immediately after the first stroke in a turn for which an Advanced Play lift may be conceded (the slightly convoluted wording is to recognise that lifts are not necessarily taken). This change should ensure that the tactics are not distorted by bisques but remain very similar to those for Level Advanced Play, and that bisques are used constructively to achieve A class breaks and, with practice, well controlled triple peels.

A 12 Certificate

It will be realised from the above that for Advanced Handicap Play to be meaningful a player must have a reasonable level of competence regardless of the number of bisques he receives. The extra six bisques proposed for the Advanced over the Ordinary Handicap variation do not make it an easier game but rather reflect the

*Advanced Handicap
should always be played
Full Bisque to Base Scratch
and no other form should
be recognised*

much greater degree of precision and control that is required to play Advanced constructively. It is not sufficient just to make breaks, they have to be executed in a specific and complex way. It is unlikely (except for bandits) that a player with a handicap much above ten or twelve would have that competence and it would not be sensible for them to embark seriously on Advanced Handicap Play until they have it. It is therefore suggested that there should be a maximum playing handicap of twelve for Advanced Handicap. This would not preclude higher bisquers from entering, but they would have to play off twelve and this should be sufficient to deter those who could not cope with the Advanced game from entering serious events.

I would also recommend a similar upper limit, in this case eighteen, for ordinary Full Bisque Handicap events in serious tournaments. This would mean that, except when playing opponents below six, no player would receive more than twelve bisques which should be enough for any

player seriously entering a CA tournament and would ensure (especially in time limited games) that no-one could win games solely through the impenetrability of their forest of bisques.

Not a Classless Society

Still considering tournaments, the proposals map well onto typical C & D Class Events. The former should well be able to play Advanced Handicap Play to Base Scratch and, if they are accustomed to playing it in their Clubs, should do well at it. The latter will play ordinary Full Bisque Handicap to base Six and should perform equally well (and more importantly for the manager, equally speedily) if it is their regular game. The A and B Class Events will remain continue to be Level Advanced Play although perhaps over the years, as the B Class players begin to have the experience of Advanced Handicap Play behind them, there should be more gold medal triples attempted than at present and the tactics will more resemble A Class play than sadly many B Class games do today.

To summarise the proposals. Although normal Difference Handicap Play will remain as an allowable variant in the Laws, Clubs and Tournaments will be expected to play only the Full Bisque variation to Base Six as the normal handicap game. Middle bisquers reaching twelve or better will be encouraged to play the Advanced Handicap Game to base Scratch, and Tournaments should provide events for them. Band A Class players will continue to play Level Advanced, but B Class players should have benefited from the opportunity to play Advanced Handicap to have honed their tactics first. No other variations should be authorised or encouraged and, from such evidence as is available so far, the Automatic Handicap System should be able to cope equitably with all these proposals.

See Me

Please note that this article is not just another set of proposals being wafted around to complicate even further an increasingly bewildering variety of options. It is a serious attempt to reduce the present complexity to a minimum set of variations for the enjoyment of players at all levels and the prosperity of the game. Readers are invited to offer their views through the columns of Croquet, and if there appears to be sufficient support the author will then seek to get the proposals more firmly established.

TOURNAMENTS

late-summer

1994

104th Open Championship Part II

Hurlingham
17th-24th July 1994

Readers of my report in the August issue on the Play at July's Open Championship may have spotted that it ended abruptly and without mention of the Plate. This was because I went to hospital for a major operation a week after the Championship. As my notes were usable by me alone I rushed out as much as I could (apparently overtaking the table of match results). I can now finish my report.

The Twist at the End

As the Singles and Doubles taper off, most of the action towards the end is always in the Association Plate, with its Draw & Process. Before it started, some of the leading triplers were suggesting it would see no TPs. In fact there were seven. Cordingley and Noble each did two (though they both also had wins +1 on time); as did Justin Goddard, who flourished with a total of ten games. On Saturday, he played five games between 10 a.m. and 9 p.m. with only two 5 minute breaks. He only lost to the winner of each half: Cordingley and Bond.

One half saw a traditional Bond-Noble lightning game. Noble won +2 (it was his turn to win) and then two +26's over Goacher and Guest took him to the final. There he lost to Cordingley, whose path thither had been

comfortable, apart from that +1 (time) against Tuke. Bond won the final of the other half, beating Goddard. He was proud of wins against Debbie Cornelius and Mark Avery (who called himself a "not yet counted-out has-been") but felt lucky to have hit a last shot in the dark against Robin Brown.

He admits to further good fortune in the Play-Off Final. In a 2-ball 4-back v 4-back ending, Phil was "going out" when a poorly run penultimate gave Ian the match. This meant that the team of the week was not, as everyone supposed, South Africa, who triumphed at both Hurlingham and Lord's, but Surbiton, whose members won the Championship, the Doubles and the Plate.

CHELTENHAM OCTOBER HANDICAP

There is no better place for a croquet player to live than adjacent to a prestigious club like Cheltenham. I therefore make no apology for beginning this report of Cheltenham October Handicap weekend in the middle when on Saturday night Stephen Badger invited all participants to a drinks party at his house next door. The rocket discharged at the end of festivities by Hugh Smorfitt is said to have landed on lawn 9.

Ian Maugham's adaptation of American Blocks with a Hands system for extra games did much to dispel the pervading gloom of the weather. On Saturday overnight fog had caused a very heavy dew. The fountain of spray that engulfed your ball was followed by a vapour trail that showed by how little you had missed that long roquet! Not that the weather prevented Stuart Daddo

Langlois from running 1 back with sufficient force to go through 2 back without, according to his opponent, Michael Rangely touching the sides! Nor did it prevent David Kibble and Mike Hammelev achieving TPO's for their gold awards or Douglas Taylor an all round break for his silver. The whole event finished with multiple bangs, Hugh Smorfitt having substituted rockets for last bisques. Altogether a well organised and enjoyable last tournament of the 1994 season. The block winners were T. Danby, D. Cross, T. Golesworthy, T. Exell, R.F. Wheeler, N. Evans, and M. Hammelev.

EDINBURGH AUG 15 - 20

The annual Edinburgh tournament is held at Fettes College to coincide with the First week of the Festival. Since croquet is generally regarded as a fringe activity this seems entirely suitable. This year visitors were welcomed from Subteen, Wrest Park and Pendle; possibly because the SCA had played the West Midlands at Bush only a couple of weeks before some regular attenders from there were missing. Over 100 games were played in the main competitions, as well as a number in the consolation event for those eliminated from the big handicap tournament, which was played as a knock-out.

Brian Murdoch was the winner of the handicap singles, beating David Farmer in the final. He skillfully contrived to keep winning in that event in spite of losing nearly all his games in his open singles block in which three players each won 5 of their 6 games and Norman Hicks was awarded the Ian Wright trophy by virtue of having a net

advantage of 71 hoop points to David Farmer's 70. Andy Campbell was third. None of the games between these three players was decided by more than 2 points.

The senior block (for the Cramond Cup) was headed convincingly by Colin Dinwoodie who won all his games, albeit two of them by only +1^T. John Beech persisted in excessive generosity to his opponents by forgetting he was giving away lifts at crucial points in several games, and the more fancied players, David Appleton and Rod Williams, never came to terms with the conditions which were actually quite difficult: the notorious slopes were particularly trying on the first day before rain slowed them down somewhat.

Players in the handicap range from 8 to 14 played for the Silver Jubilee Trophy. Brian Medley and Tony Brightman won all their games in two blocks of five, and Brian won the play-off. The ten players with handicaps of 16 and over who competed for the Walter B Laing cup played to a similar format, with Jamieson Walker beating Fergus McInnes in the play-off. It was good to see some of the less experienced players in this last group improving noticeably through the week and putting several bisques to good use to build breaks.

As always, the handicap doubles were entertaining, not least a close game between Jamieson Walker and Maria Limonci, highest handicapped with a total of 40 bisques, against the lowest pair, David Appleton and Brian Murdoch. In the final Nigel Gardner and Stuart McKendrick could not quite hold Colin Dinwoodie and Tony Brightman.

The consolation event was won by Normal Hicks and the prize for playing best without winning a trophy went to David Farmer.

One aspect of the week must not pass without comment, and that is the standard of the catering. There was morning coffee and biscuits; and excellent three-course lunch with splendid home-made soup and a choice of hot or cold main course, with biscuits and cheese and coffee as an option or even an addition to the sweet; and afternoon tea with sandwiches and cakes. This cost the embarrassingly low sum of £3 per day. If this is not the best value for money on the British croquet circuit, please let me know which club beats it.

HUNSTANTON 31 APR - 2nd MAY

Several years ago I played in my first tournament at Hunstanton where I was assured that the welcome would be warm even if the weather was not. The most important thing, I was told, was to take plenty of warm clothes and at least two sets of water-proofs. This year, once again, I set off to the North Norfolk coast with my bags full of woolly jumpers. The welcome was as warm as ever and the liquid came not from the skies but from Surbiton - the Lord moves in mysterious ways. The 32 participants and the catering staff - who did the usual good

job - enjoyed three days of sunshine and fun. Great interest was shown in the snooker, the 2000 guineas and the football. The relaxed atmosphere gave people time to theorise and hypothesise on the relative merits of Chisunck and London's Pride. The cup was presented to Ian Bond.

Celia Pearce

THE NATIONAL TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS 1995

Under a dismal sky, and on worse lawns, the Mary Rose final and Longman Cup semis commenced.

The MR was between the locals Cheltenham and the long distance travellers Tyneside. Tyneside got off to a good start by winning the doubles and following singles in a short order. In fact it looked all over when Derek Trotman pegged out Paddy Paddon. However, after missing a couple of shots, Paddy hit when Derek stuck in penult, and finished. Cheltenham needed the last two singles to win. This they did despite Peter Darby trying hard to lose from peg and rover.

The LC games were between Northampton and Bury & Roehampton and Colworth. The first of these was a rather drawn-out affair with most games going to, or near, time. Some fun was had when Bury played wrong ball and replaced them only to have - you've guessed it - Northampton playing the wrong ball! The other match, although also a 3:2 result was a little more decisive, including a surprising +26 by Weightman and Cordwell for Colworth.

The next day saw the LC final and the Inter-Club final. This last was between Bowdon and Hurlingham.

The I-C final saw no spectacular play other than a tidy triple from Tom Coles. With Bowdon 4 up, Irwin and Gunasekera gave up being rained upon and the prize was duly presented to Bowdon.

The LC final saw Northampton gradually take the upper hand, being 2 up by lunch. Amazingly yet another doubles +26 was recorded. This time, A. Weightman, partnered by Judy Anderson was on the receiving end of Northampton's J. Skelton and B. Dickens. Northampton was now 3 up, so the cup was presented. However Colworth's S. Jones continued to battle it out hoop by painful hoop to beat B. Dickens by +3T, saving a whitewash.

ROEHAMPTON 4 DAY SOUTHERN UNDEFEATED

Picture it. Roehampton October 1994. Four day handicap tournament. Weather grey and cool. Lawns green and medium paced. Sixteen players have entered. Scratch player wins all his games and takes away his trophy. That is what happened when Colin Southern

from Woking Croquet Club turned in as super performance to win the Hussars Cup winning all of his ten games. Scratch players do not enter too many handicap events these days to it is great when one does and plays so well. In one game he was giving twenty bisques to his opponent; poor Olive couldn't see the wood for the trees! At the end of the tournament Colin took away the trophy and a handicap reduction. Well done Colin! The rest of us have a lot of hard work to do to reach your standard of play.

The manager, Robert Pennant Jones, organised the event into two American blocks each of eight people with the top three in each block plus the next two with the best record (from either block) going into the knock out stage for the Hussars Cup - as la World Cup Football. The eight who did not make it went into a separate consolation knock out of their own. Additionally there was an optional 14 point Egyptian running for people who were in between games or had been knocked out of the knock-out stage. So all in all there was plenty of opportunity for croquet to be played. Congratulations to the manager; there is nothing worse than sitting around for long periods waiting for games.

Thanks to the hospitality of the Roehampton Club everyone seemed to enjoy themselves even on lawn four (a tennis court) which the groundsman had already scarified! Here's hoping we see Colin again next season to defend the trophy when a few people may be seeking revenge

Dennis Goulding

SECRETARY'S SHIELD

In 1993 the Northampton Croquet Club had surpassed themselves by winning The Longman Cup. This was a remarkable feat for a club so young and lacking in experience in competitions (only their fourth year).

However, twelve months later they were to return to Cheltenham with the hope of retaining this title. In the semi-final they had to overcome a very strong and determined side from Bury who threw everything they could muster at the Northampton team. Northampton only just scraped through, but before tea the following day the cup was theirs once more.

If this was not enough Northampton were also in the final of the Secretary's Shield to be played out one week later. Knowing their opponents would be Bury once again the following six days were spent in preparation for an even greater challenge. The format for The Secretary's Shield, being one doubles and six singles matches, is a more exacting test for players and Northampton's captain, Dennis Shaw, had to give plenty of thought to his team choice.

In fact, only one change was made to the Longman Cup team by replacing James Skelton with Lionel Tibble, now down to one and a half and bringing experience and extra fire power.

The venue was Carden Park in Cheshire

which had been used to host the World Championships on August 10th. Three perfectly flat lawns in pristine condition were laid out on what was described as the largest laser levelled expanse of lawn in Europe.

The line up for the doubles saw Lionel Tibble with Bert Dickens against Bury's David Barratt and Ken Anderson. Lionel opened his account with a break that took him to four-back whilst Bury's captain, David, playing off five, was in hot pursuit. Northampton hung in and chalked up the first victory of the day with the result +9.

In the singles Dennis was playing Len Forkin and Nick Evans played Tony Philips. For Dennis this was a chance to get even having lost to Len at Cheltenham the previous week, and his determination paid off with the result +6 on time. Meanwhile things were going a lot better for Tony Philips who kept Nick Evans out of the game for nearly an hour by accurate separation and wiring. This was Bury's only win from the morning session with the result +8 on time.

Unlike the final of the Longman Cup the Secretary's Shield was played in perfect conditions with the weather improving as the day went on. The Northampton team, although 2 - 1 up, were not feeling too confident for the afternoon session, especially after witnessing the accuracy of Bury's hitting-in. Lionel had to concede three and a half bisques to David for his second match, and Dennis was drawn against Tony who was obviously on a winning streak having won the last ten games he'd played. For the Northampton team the best chances lay with Bert and Nick.

It wasn't long before Dennis was in trouble having wasted four bisques just to control the break. In fact, once his bisques were gone he completed a ten hoop break with ease - just proving the old theory that people play better when all the bisques are gone. Unfortunately, for Dennis, Tony Philips was still hitting his roquets with same accuracy that he'd used to overcome Nick earlier. And so, with a win for Bury (+16), games were now two all.

The next game to end brought relief to Northampton as Lionel Tibble beat David Barratt +14. This was more a surprise to Lionel than anyone else who did not favour his chances against a five handicap player armed with three and a half bisques. But it was for this reason that Dennis Shaw had selected him, and the selection proved correct.

Around five o'clock with about 30 minutes of play left four players were still battling it out. In fact, Nick appeared to be comfortably placed laid up with a simple rush to penult and his front ball on the peg. With Ken on three and one-back Northampton were anticipating a raid end, but they did not account for a long roquet from Ken which he capitalised on by running nine hoops with superb control. Once Ken had made rover Nick had to face up to the possibility of being pegged out. Ken decided to leave four balls available and turned the tables completely

by leaving himself a simple rush to one-back with Nick nowhere safe to go. Watching all this, of course, were Lionel and Dennis who decided to quietly inform the now pale looking Nick Evans that Bert was struggling against Len Forkin and that he best get back in the driving seat.

If ever there was a time to hit back and hit in it was now; and that's exactly what Nick did, plus petting-out his opponent's ball and his own. The resulting two ball game left Nick with just two hoops to run and Ken with six. If nothing else, this was good stuff to watch and produced the nearest thing to a crowd. Ken came as near as could be expected to pulling off a victory but Nick slowly rolled up to the peg to score the final point and a +2 win for Northampton. The final score for the day was four-three.

The Shield was presented to Dennis Shaw by the referee, Brian Storey, whose expert advice was required on several occasions. Many thanks were offered to him.

The long journey back down the congested M6 for Northampton was made much easier with the Shield safely in their grasp. A good day's work and a splendid twelve month's progress for Northampton who are now going to find it more difficult to repeat this task as their handicaps drop and new fast improvers appear in other teams. There are plenty of clubs that would dearly wish to win the Longman or the Secretary's Shield and for Northampton to lift both titles within one week should keep them contented for many a season to come.

SURBITON 28 - 29 AUG

A full entry of sixteen competed in a knockout for the weekend, played as a single game for the first round, and best of three for the quarter-final, semi-final and final.

The courts were still hard and dry and proved to be challenging, there being only one triple peel, by David Wiggins against Chris Osmond, and most matches taking longer than expected.

Lewis Palmer won against Julian Sheraton-Davis +26, then defeated Nigel Gale +15, +25, but in the semi-final he lost to a resilient Tony Mrozinski -16, +23, -2. In the last game Tony hit a long shot, when Lewis had laid up with a very reasonable chance of winning if Tony had missed.

Meanwhile Martin Haggerston was progressing to the final in his usual serene manner, beating Adrian Wadley +20, Graham Gale +21, +7, and Alec Thomas +3, +21.

In the final Tony Mrozinski had a long struggle to defeat Martin Haggerston two games to nil, finishing late on Monday evening, when there was no time for a third game had it been required.

Next year the format will again be a knockout with an entry of sixteen, but with single games for the first round and quarter final and best of three for the semi-final and final, with a Swiss consolation event.

Winner: Tony Mrozinski.
Alec Thomas

WOKING SHORT CROQUET WEEKEND

The weather was kind for Woking's Short Croquet Weekend in September and the six lawns stretching away from the Club house were an active and dramatic view. Indeed unsuspecting visiting tennis players, who also came to Woking that weekend for their ratings trials, were astonished by the sight and the realisation that they had been banished to the remoter courts as a lesser event.

Four swiss rounds of doubles and five of singles were played, making a total of 70 games over the weekend. Bob Smith won the singles undefeated, with Roger Bell defeating John Haigh in a tie breaker to take the second goblet. In the Doubles, Dennis Goulding and Maureen Bell were also undefeated, and second place was shared by Gill McDiarmid and Lionel Wharrad and Roger Schofield and Roger Bell.

As in previous years the event showed that Short Croquet can provide an excellent format for an enjoyable weekend and that the handicapping system works well for players of widely varying abilities, including the adjustments made for doubles.

ALL ENGLAND HANDICAP

The winners of the six Area Finals reported at Nottingham on 24 September for what was to prove to be an enjoyable, if rather cool, weekend.

Handicaps varied from three to 16 and ages from thirteen to a lot.

With six contestants, the Tournament was played as a single block, with everyone playing everyone else.

Saturday's games were close and after the three rounds, four players had won two, but it was becoming obvious that the two youngsters, David Matthews, aged 13 years, (handicap 16), and James Burch, aged 14 years (handicap 11), were favourites to win. Both were showing a maturity which belied their age, choosing to play handicap difference, so as to deny their opponents the chance of using bisques to set up breaks and then using their own bisques intelligently to set up and keep four ball breaks going.

Sunday morning saw David beat Joe King +12 and James demolish Don Wright by 23 and with Paul Salisbury beating Dan Windham, the two boys were the only ones with three wins. Their final game against each other, therefore, became the final and proved a most entertaining game. James, playing without bisques, quickly went to five but David, using bisques, then went to one back, only for James to take his second ball to one back in a single break. David then controlled the game until running out of bisques when Rover and Rover. James hit in and confidently went to four back before being stuck in the hoop. He had two more changes when David was peg and peg but failed in his approach to three back and later with David laid up with a rush out of third corner

towards the peg, narrowly failed to hit in.

BARLOW BOWL

What makes a good croquet tournament in my humble opinion is a friendly atmosphere, good facilities, lunch, coffee, a few laughs and of course some good croquet, so this must have been a good tournament as all of the above elements were available in great abundance. Well no actually it wasn't a good tournament, it was a great tournament, we even had more spectators than the world championships.

The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, the lunches were long and luxurious, the laughs were many and varied in length, volume and reason and the croquet was of a quality consistently higher than any of the competitors had experienced in such past events. But who did what?

Well the debutant first, Audrey Whitaker scared everyone with her shooting ability, as if a ball wasn't

wired it wasn't safe, guarded boundary or no guarded boundary. Her break play was accurate and showed imagination and flair although as Audrey herself pointed out, her tactics were occasionally one step behind some of that of her opponents, but that I doubt will remain the case for long. Rosemary Guban took time off from singing this year and produced the careful accurate play that took her to the Women's final in all of the games and for some time looked like she could necessitate a play-off to settle the winner.

And of those more experienced, Bo Harris played steadily and punished severely any errors made by her opponents. Pauline Healy, last years runner-up, unfortunately could not emulate the high standards she played to then but nobody should underestimate her and she did know some good jokes and peeled a mean orange. Gail Curry was admittedly not her best but didn't let that hinder her in any way, producing some imaginative play and attempting triples from seemingly impossible positions just for the fun of it, in fact the failed ones were the most fun. However the 'little star' of the week was undoubtedly Frances ransom, who deservedly won the elusive trophy with a five day display of precise and consistent croquet which nobody could quite match for long enough to prevent her from grasping the trophy for the first time.

BUDLEIGH SALTERTON

Heavy rain was forecast throughout the region for the whole weekend. At about 09.30 hrs on the Saturday morning, as if by command, rain virtually stopped and apart from a few large drops from time to time - stayed stopped! Budleigh often seems to have a micro-climate all of its own, enabling play to take place in the dry against the odds. (For the record, it poured over night, but Sunday was also dry until close of play when the heavens opened!)

The event was played as a "modified" Swiss or was it Egyptian? The range of handicaps from 2 to 12 enabled Manager George Webb to arrange some creative pairings amongst the 11 entries plus a mysterious "sub". A local rule was introduced in that if a lift was taken, then a bisque could not be used in that turn. This seemed to work well and in practice lifts, when due, were mostly taken.

Lunch at Budleigh is almost sacrosanct and the ladies provided excellent fare - likewise tea. Players not renowned for stopping in the middle of games were viewed rushing to the pavilion as rumours that the chocolate cake was nearly all gone spread rapidly. In order to satisfy this craving for good food and much croquet, all present agreed to start at 09.00 hrs on Day 2. Second games were underway by the time the lunch bell sounded at 12.30 and shortly afterwards the lawns were empty of players. Play recommenced just after 13.00. Third games for those who wished to play all six promised were completed by about 17.00 hrs.

Interestingly, only one game out of the 30 or so played went to time. A third of the games had single figure results. Ted Scott (2) from the East Riding looked to be the winner until Martin Ansell (3 1/2) ex Bristol after an age with both balls on peg finally made it. Shaun Carter (3 1.2) had been watching this duel with considerable vested interest whilst playing on an adjacent lawn thus became the outright winner with 5 wins. Arthur Addis (3 1/2), Stuart Orr (8) and Ted tied for second place with 4 wins each. (Shaun, Arthur and Stuart are all members of Plymouth and also Far Country members of Budleigh)

All present agreed that, as an experiment in running an advanced handicap tournament, the weekend was a great success. Hopefully, this format will soon become more popular - there is no doubt in the writer's mind that it makes for a far more interesting contest.

CASSIOBURY 5/7 AUGUST

14 contestants played 35 games in 2 American blocks with some games eliminated. Cassiobury members and some from High Wycombe played 6 matches on the Friday afternoon which got the tournament off to a good start.

Joanna Geddes (14), a member of Ealing Club and daughter of last year's winner Mrs R A Welch was the losing finalist and the only lady to take part.

The play-off final was between Joanna and Cornishman, Quiller Barrett (14) who was delighted to win a tournament for the first time.

John Norris (12), from Ormsby Hall in Teeside, beat Quiller +8, in Block A, and matched him with 4 wins but lost to Cassiobury Hon Sec Arthur Reed (1 1/2) by -3 where Quiller beat him +22. Arthur came third in the block with 3 wins.

Roger Jackman (2 1/2) with 4 wins had as

many as Joanna in Block B, but won by smaller margins. Keith Noble (14) came third in the block with 3 wins.

Alan Oldham was installed in a hired pavilion against the elements yet it remained sunny and hot. His usual benevolent management was applauded at the conclusion as were the ample teas prepared and conveyed to the Club by Arthur's wife, Sue Reed and their daughter Vicki.

Club Captain, David Drazin turned out early every day and set the hops and Treasurer, Bill Gillott bought ten new white plastic high backed chairs for the ease and comfort of our guests.

The Borough Council Leisure Department kindly made a temporary third court available which made a larger entry possible. It also provided a testing surface and frustration for some, on occasions, but no more than at other events I am told. Next year we could have yet another court available at a private house near Radlett thanks to the generosity of a new member.

Chairman Mrs Betty Purvis, who came and made coffee and tea to refresh us on Saturday and Sunday, presented the Silver Cup, given in memory of her late husband, to an appreciative Quiller Barratt who thanked the Club on behalf of the visitors.

The Tournament was over subscribed and we commiserate with those who could not get in. It is pleasing to find that people will come from far and wide to this, one of the older clubs in the country. We look forward to seeing yet more new faces in 1995. Entrants, including club members, will need to book early to avoid disappointment.

CHELTENHAM 9 - 11 SEPT

The number 3 has always been thought to be a magical number and 3 x 3 can only be more so. It was indeed the magic number for Nick Heriz-Smith of Cheltenham, with his 9 bisques, who was undefeated in 9 games played during the 2 1/2 days of the tournament.

This comparative newcomer to the game has quickly carved his niche in the folk-lore of banditry. His game against Eileen Magee ended with some interest; having pegged out Eileen's ball, he very soon accidentally pegged out his own, and the ensuing one-ball contest became a game of cat and mouse with bisques - but Nick won in the end. The magic will perhaps no longer be so effective as he is now a 7, well on the way to being a 6, and with a silver merit award too.

Lesser mortals rose and fell in their turn, all with brief hopes of one of the 4 prizes on offer, only to have them dashed by Nick, Margaret Selmes (with 6 wins out of 7), Fred Smith (with 5 wins out of 6 - Fred realised too late that he should have played more games) and Faith Fewtrell who finished fourth.

Four scratch players were among the 36 entrants, all badly mauled by the competent high-bisquers that the game now seems to produce. A cry of "I've pulled out 125

bisques!" was followed by "You're luck, I've lost count!" and one of those pulling bisques with lots of time to sit and reflect offered the following Haiku:

*Beautiful woman,
ten damned bisques;
better in bed!*

Bob Fewtrell, despite facing a number of defeats, produced that special moment and won his gold award. He also led the whole field with 10 games played (it won him a Mars bar!)

The Egyptian format always provides plenty of games for those who wish to keep on playing, and the event was well managed by Dab and Roger Wheeler, ably assisted by John Lansdown making his managerial debut. A double bonus came in the form of glorious weather (except for one torrential rainstorm) and hot toasted buns at tea-time - well done the tea ladies!

CHELTHENHAM 27 - 29 AUG

This weekend saw the debut of the Dorke Simplified Egyptian system, operated by 56 'guinea pigs' on lawns that were nearly all very fast and some downright glassy (making the managerial proclamation that there would be a prize for the highest bisquer to achieve a triple peel or other manoeuvre of that ilk appear a trifle optimistic...). The intention not to impose time limits had to be modified after the first morning when a least one game almost reached five hours in length and another had ambitions for six, but even so some of the players had such extended waits between games that they felt Cheltenham would have done better to restrict the entry to 48 (especially after they found they had to rise with the dawn chorus in order to be able to park in a reasonably sane position).

"But what is the Dorke Simplified Egyptian system?" rise the frustrated shrieks. Well, it went like this... The players were put into blocks, which incidentally worked out in handicap ranges of - 1/2 to 0, 1 1/2 to 2, 2 1/2 to 4, 5 to 7, and 8 to 14. Blocks A to D played advanced, Block E level but with bisques if wished by mutual agreement. The simplification lay in there being no extra cards involved. Instead, the block sheets had column headings and under 'Index' you filled in your current index as per your CA Handicap Index Card. After each game you put your new index in the appropriate column, and under '+/-' your cumulative improvement (or otherwise!). For example, if in your first game you beat an opponent of equal handicap rating, your cumulative total would be +10; if in the next game you lost to an opponent one step lower, you lost - 9 index points and your cumulative total became +1. (One player played six games, won three of them, and had a net increase of 0 - some people might feel this says something about the efficacy of the handicap index system...? I won't disclose her name, but at this very instant she is not six million miles

from a word processor...) The player in each block whose cumulative total of improvement was the greatest was block winner (in this instance Bob Fewtrell, Lionel Tibbles, Carol Smith, John Brudenell and Dab Wheeler), and the block winner with the greatest improvement was the overall winner (Lionel, +65). In order to give you a chance to amass even more brownie points you were permitted to challenge lower bisquers in other blocks if you felt an unconquerable urge to try to reach your next trigger point (as more than one player did successfully); on one of his ubiquitous sheets of yellow paper the manager sternly underlined the words "SUCH A CHALLENGE MAY NOT BE REFUSED".

(He subsequently inverted this dictum by challenging Margaretha Regan!) Oh, and no skulking off to bag your favourite lawn behind the management's collective backs - all games had to be officially notified to either Peter or Geraldine, not least so that they could keep track of who had played whom.

"This is *simplified*?" you expostulate, after this verbose explanation: but once we had all been trained out of putting our scores in the '+/-' column and putting them on the order of play sheets instead (!), the general consensus among the players seemed to be, as per "1066 And All That", that the new system was A Good Thing - reactions ranged from "Yeah, it's all right, isn't it?" all the way up to "Excellent!". So, good marks on your Record of Achievement, Peter and Geraldine!

In point of fact, some of the fiercest competition took place not on the lawns, but over who was going to write the tournament report. Stuart Daddo-Langlois regretfully had to scratch from the contest, whereupon I put my hand up, shouting, "Sir, sir, please, sir!" However, it seemed that that revered icon of the croquet world, Dorothy Rush, no less, had considered putting herself forward for this signal honour, and I very naturally had no wish to upset such a venerable person. In his office as manager, however, Peter interceded on my behalf, and she very graciously deferred to the less experienced reporter...

So what little anecdotes can I recount for you? Can I perhaps offer you the echoes of Paul Smith's sniggers when Roger Jenkins missed a roquet which he himself declared to me to be no more than an inch, because he *underhit* the stroke? (Roger reckons it must be the shortest roquet ever missed!) Or what about Richard Brand being inspired by the sight of a prone double-banker lining up a peel to suddenly sprint across the lawn and dive over him to execute a rolling somersault? Why was Hugh Smorfitt dubbed "Mafia", for reasons he begged me not to disclose but will be clear to anyone involved in the 'knock over the bisque' game conducted near court 1? What of Ivor Brand and Jon Smith, who couldn't stop running their hoops from the other side of the lawn instead of from within the preferable customary one foot range? Would you have liked to see Peter failing to see the Mexican Wave on the bench by court

2 when Carol Smith pegged out against David Kibble because, he said, "he was concentrating on his game - AS USUAL", thereby drawing a derisive roar from the gallery? My personal favourite was when Richard Brand and Alex Jardine were clearing court 1 and the black ball went AWOL in the beech hedge. Being unable to find it there, they decided to check in the bottom of a couple of beer glasses. Meanwhile Laurence and I and Jon Smith continued the search, and I shall never forget the look on their faces when Jon rushed into the bar triumphantly brandishing the missing ball and Laurence said grimly, "And you've been looking for it in *here*...!"

COLCHESTER 19 - 21 AUGUST

Colchester's first ever Over 60 Tournament was well supported and was contested at the gentle rate of two games per day in dry, mainly sunny weather. No less than seven games ended with the proverbial plus one on time, the longest taking nearly half an hour after time to resolve. Congratulations to Colchester's Ron Harris, who won all six games and to the joint runners up Edna Robinetta of Bury St. Edmunds, Bernard Webster from Plymouth and Ron Atkinson from Newport.

COLCHESTER 3 - 4 SEPT

Outright winner of the Easters Area Final was Dan Windham from Norwich.

Both matches in the first round ended in plus one on time winds for David Tutt (Letchworth) and Dennis Saville (Newport). In round two Dan Windham won by 14 on time, Tutt won +11, Saville won +18 and Chris Clarke (-12) had a +22 victory in 58 minutes. Round three saw Clarke taking 90 minutes to beat Saville +16, whilst Tutt and Windham had a tough struggle ending with a three ball game which Windham won by 4 despite having only one ball for the final 50 minutes. The final took place on the Sunday morning when Windham played steadily and used his bisques well to defeat Clarke +25.

Of the nine games played, 7 were on bisque difference, the only two games using full bisques were in the second round between Windham and Potter (7 & 14 handicaps) and Williams and Saville (7 & 6 handicaps). There were no handicap changes to report.

It would have been helpful to have received the names of all the finalists before 1st September!

COLCHESTER 5 - 7 AUGUST

Four withdrawals in the week leading up to this tournament saw the field reduced to ten, so the manager abandoned the advertised swiss in favour of one large block.

Handicaps ranged from 1/2 to 24, with two players in their first C.A. tournament. Nine rounds were completed in beautiful weather and with Colchester's lawns almost back to their old high quality.

COMPTON 30th April - May 2nd

The May Day weekend at the Compton Club was spectacular! The weather was brilliant, the arrangements superb, the lawns perfect, the hospitality couldn't have been bettered and - probably - the right man won!

And having said all that I suppose I should move on, quote the results and then quit while I'm ahead! But that would not do the Compton justice - not by a long chalk. So perhaps a little rumination is in order before identifying who the "right man" was.

The drive from Tunbridge Wells to Eastbourne is, in rough terms, 30 miles - say 45 minutes on a good day. But, you know, I find I normally need all of that time just to psyche myself up for the occasion. I cannot remember any visit to the Compton when my games have been just that - a matter of 52 points to be fought over, a congratulatory shaking of hand and a swift beverage before starting all over again. Such a mundane series of events, I'm sure, only happens in the books. At the Compton you have to be ready for anything.

How about the game I am certain I only won because some local dignitary decided he needed to land his helicopter practically on top of us and - I swear - blew my opponents ball off its certain course towards 4-back and a thoroughly deserved win. Or when the local young ladies cricket club - with perfectly good intentions I'm sure - decided to display their athletic (and, may I say, extremely vocal!) talents sufficiently close to a very absorbing game to provide just the right amount of pleasant distraction to offset the pain of my losing by a mile.

Can you imagine any other club that can so organise it's September tournament that right in the middle of a pivotal game the Chancellor of the Exchequer puts interest rates up to 15%, calls my opponent on his mobile phone (though not personally I understand) so that he might learn of the total collapse of his personal (and of all his clients') financial strategies. Now that's real class!

So... my times at Compton have always been eventful in a sort of unpredictable way - and the May Day weekend was no exception.

Who ever heard of playing on film set? The Manager who I could have sworn was supposed to be Roy Wallis turned out to be Peter Ustinov dressed as the Estonian (?) prince in Romanoff and Juliet with full embroidered sash and all. The cast of Genevieve were there - well, at least, I assume so. One very elegantly dressed lady wore one of those delicious white hats with a white scarf over the top and tied under her chin - to stop wind-burn, I understand.

The shoot-out between Clive Horton and Barry James would have done credit to High Noon - particularly as the good guy (i.e. the one from Tunbridge Wells) won!

And my final snippet? Well it brings me right back to where we started - just who was the "right man" who took all the honours? Well I never did find out for sure. He called himself Tony Fathers - but I know better. With that cool professional approach to the total assassination of the opposition (48 points in his last two and most difficult games) he just had to be The Jackal.

And the rest of the results? Well the "good guy" from Tunbridge Wells (surely it should be Laughton, not Horton?) took second place honours with other places being taken by...?

Well, you'll just have to ask the Estonian prince when you next see him!

P.S. My favourite (real) Ustinov quote is as follows "The kind of person I really respect is one who aims low - and still misses!" What an apt description both of my own play at the Compton and of my intention to write this review while it could still be judged as on time!

HUNSTANTON

How can I have lived on this earth for 60-odd years and only now have discovered the Hunstanton Annual Tournament? The fact that my normal place of residence is some 10,000 miles away is hardly sufficient excuse. On a Bank Holiday weekend, a stone's throw from the town and beach, the holiday reaches out to the club. Players have come from far and wide to enjoy themselves. Everybody is your friend. The relaxed atmosphere, the excellent catering, the no-fuss management and, as a bonus, the glorious sunshine made it a croquet experience to be long remembered.

Entries were limited to 28 players, but owing to cancellations only 256 players put mallet to ball. Saturday afternoon and Sunday were devoted to a handicap event in Egyptian format. On Monday the players were divided into 4 blocks according to handicap viz. block A 7 players, handicaps up to 3; block B7, 3 1/2 to 4 1.2, block C, 6, 5 - 10; block D, 6, handicaps over 10. Each block was then run as a separate event, blocks A and B being played as advanced level, blocks C and D as handicap. Players were required to play 2 games per day in the block and thereafter could optionally continue in the Egyptian as opponents / courts became available. Games were double-banked throughout.

The 5 courts had been well prepared and looked beautiful on Saturday morning, but with heavy use, almost continuous sunshine and a strong, drying breeze they soon took on the appearance of faded camouflage. This, along with tight, firmly set hoops and the so-called Barlow factor (of which more to follow!) was not conducive to break playing and everybody got lots of turns. Indeed it was never safe to leave the court, even for a

minute. This restored my faith in the game, shattered by the tedious succession of triple peels on display at Carden Park the previous week.

The Barlow balls were a constant subject of court-side comment. Players would lament that they were getting "Barlowed" at every hoop. I heard one player say, "These balls are soft and rubbery and they get sticky. (No pun intended?) I hate them." Many times I heard, "A Jaques Would've sailed through." Someone said "Why don't we play with Dawsons? They behave exactly like the Jaques." Naturally I rose to the bait. Having spent the last 5 years going around the vicious triangle of Jaques, Dawson. Barlow, my game going to pot in the process, I prefer Barlows to Dawsons but there is nothing that is anything like a Jaques.

However, I think the balls were unjustly blamed for a problem that came mainly from the sun above and the earth below. It is not an unfamiliar problem in Australia where hard sun-baked courts are not such a rarity. I have had the same trouble with all three makes of balls in these conditions. What we really needed was not different balls but a good downpour!

I must mention a couple of things that will amuse Australian readers (and there are some!), e.g. the method of indicating bisques with a row of white pegs, banged into the ground in single file like soldiers on parade, along the outside of the court, sometimes a little one at the end, the 1/2 bisque.

I was amazed to see several players puffing away at their pipes as they took their stance for a stroke. Would the ball make the roquet or the pipe?

Many features were quite different from the average Australian Club Tournament e.g. the

Egyptian format, the general informality, the minimal use of referees, the timing arrangements, the catering arrangements etc. This is not to imply a value judgment between the two. The same key does not open all doors. But I will certainly be taking back a few ideas to try out.

Thank you Martin Kolbuszewski (Manager) Nick Harris (R.O.T.) Sarah Hampson (ever busy Tournament Secretary) and all club members for a most enjoyable and rewarding Tournament.

NATIONAL SHORT CROQUET COMPETITION

After a falling off of entries in '92 and '93 the figures went back up to the '91 levels. 15 clubs entered 116 players, who provided area finalists for 1 new venues, Ashby and Ealing, and 1 old one, Cheltenham. The National Final was again at Edgbaston where Chris Bennett organised an enjoyable and close-fought American block followed by a play-off in which Ruth Yond of High Wycombe narrowly defeated her fellow club member, Chris Wood. It was a final in which the percentage player overcame the brilliance of her opponent.

Third place went to Rachel Scott of Bristol, who at 13 years of age must be the youngest person ever to reach the final of this competition.

Many thanks to David Earl of Ealing, Andrew Potter of Cheltenham, Gary Norman of Ashby and Chris Bennett of Edgbaston, without whom no competition would have been possible.

NOTTINGHAM 16 - 18 SEPT

Once again I wound my way up to Nottingham to make my democratic protest at Cheltenham's September Weekend Tournament being full bisque. As ever there was a good crowd at Highfields with competitors from Notts, Leicester, Harrow, York and Solihull to name but some, with handicaps ranging from scratch to 20. As promised by those computer aided clairvoyants at the London weather centre, it did not rain all weekend but water did manage to play a role during the weekend as many a competitor was seen fishing a croquet ball out of the stream backing lawns 2 to 5. David Carpenter may have won the prize for hitting most balls into the stream: he certainly won the prize for recovering more balls than he hit in. I wonder how long that black ball had been immersed

Rick Davis yet again performed managerial miracles with a "sleight of Hands" format without time limits allowing considerable flexibility for those of us who were indulging in a little more than just croquet. Most players got 7 games in, Gary Bennett managed 9 games and a Gold Award. This was the more impressive as he started one of his games with an interesting hoop 1 attempt, cunningly blobbed to tempt his opponent who promptly roqueted, failed the hoop approach and took position in front of hoop 1. This allowed Gary to 3 ball to 4 back in the third turn! This performance was in stark contrast to another game where 2 A/B class players played 10 consecutive turns without either taking croquet!

The overall winner was David Brydon who played very consistently with John Filsak runner up. Thanks should go to all involved including Gordon Hopewell for another excellent barbecue.

RYDE 2 - 4 SEPT

Ryde's final 1994 event attracted entries from Guildford, Bowdon, Solihull, High Wycombe, Woking, Reading and Cheltenham, as well as five local players.

With handicaps stretching from 18 down to scratch, the tournament was run to an Egyptian format by Roy Newnham with my 'L' plated assistance.

On the first day, Roy wondered whether his decision to impose no time limits was wise as a mega length match between Nigel Grant (High Wycombe) and David Mooney (Bowdon) dominated the schedule. Nigel eventually won +3, but both players went on

to greater glory with Nigel winning the 'B' Block and David qualifying for a silver medal in his match against John Lovatt (Solihull/Edgbaston).

John's clubmate, Ian McClelland, won the 'A' Block despite losing to Nigel Grant and Philip Kennerley (Ryde).

The weather encompassed all emotions - it always does when Ryde Carnival is on! - but most games were played in the dry.

Why not come and join us as a tournament next season?

MOTHER BURCHED BY SON

The SE Area Finals of the All England Handicap Tournament held at Southwick had 14 players of handicaps ranging from 3 1/2 up to 20. Everyone will have their own personal memories of this weekends play and I am sure that Myra Gosney will have been encouraged enough by her results to enter more tournaments in the future. Her victories over William Jacot (+2 OT) and Adrian Dickins (+1 OT) were a good example to other newcomers of what can be achieved with a bit of determination and concentration.

In the meantime Wendy Burch decided to overcome her nerves of playing lower handicap players and suing the bisques promptly dispatched Roy Ware 4 1/2 and Peter McGowan 3 1/2 by scores of +23 and +8 respectively to progress into the semi-final against Myra Gosney.

In the top end of the draw young Jamie Burch had a bye in the first round and then in his very casual style defeated Martin Gay to reach the semi-final. The other games in the top half were close encounters with Graham Bonnett being the last successful player to reach the semi-final.

Both semi-finals were close encounters which could have gone either way but two +4 victories saw the climax of the weekend being a Mother v Son final.

The final was a slightly one sided affair in the favour of 12 year old Jamie who played a very good game to defeat his Mother +21. As he starts to take the game more seriously he is going to be difficult to beat. I am sure that in defeat Wendy and Father Frank, who had been watching from the side, were more than a little bit proud of their son as he gave his Mother a big hug at the end of the game.

Congratulations to the Manager Bill Arliss on a well run weekend. Just one suggestion for future years as some players have a long distance to travel it might be an idea to run the Area Finals as an American Block so that players get more than one game and not Knocked out after one round.

SIDMOUTH - 10 - 11 SEPT

Have you ever been to a tournament venue for the first time and immediately had the feeling, "Yes - I'd like to come here again"? Well, I had that feeling about Sidmouth. Court 1 is right beside the lovely E-shaped thatched clubhouse, where the beautifully

presented lunches appeared each day, and where there were scones laden with jam and cream at tea. Courts 2, 3 and 4 are about a hundred yards away, lined up alongside the road, giving holidaying passersby the opportunity to pause, stare in tolerant incomprehension at the esoteric goings-on, decide it's all Greek to them and wander off to look at the sea, which is only about another hundred yards away. But somehow all this extra-tournament activity seems minimally intrusive, and even if it weren't, it would still be worth it for the opportunity to play on Court 1, which was relayed about two years ago, affording the rather uncommon experience of playing on an almost entirely flat surface - wonderful! (Mind you, it was there that Shaun Carter was much amused by my getting to peg and peg against Michael Rangely, and still being there about three-quarters of an hour later. I said that when I was writing the report I'd say I was procrastinating just to annoy Shaun. "Never mind Shaun!" said Michael plaintively. "What about me?")

The clientele of the tournament was split roughly fifty-fifty between visitors and local members; the former included John Toye and Michael and Margaret Hornby from Budleigh Salterton, Michael Rangeley from Cheltenham, Stuart Orr and Shaun Carter from Plymouth, Mary Cook from Bristol, Roy Tillcock from Reading, and Laurence and myself. The home flag was being carried by Roland and Vera Henderson, Ted and Esme Owen, Sheila Adams, John Hatherley, Tony Dustan-Smith (who achieved the only +26 of the weekend) and Les Toye (and it's only too clear from where John inherited the gene which gives him his flair for the game!). Iris Dwerryhouse was the manager while Phil prowled around among the small but select band of peripatetic non-playing referees (an unaccustomed luxury, that!).

The players were split into two blocks of ten and eight in graduated handicaps. Block A ranged from -1 to 7 and played five Swiss rounds, while Block B were on 3 1/2 hour time limits for their four rounds and played full bisque games. It had been hoped that that last would promote speedy play, but in some cases the bisques were hoarded more carefully than a squirrel nurses his winter larder, so more games went to time than originally hoped. The thought was put forward from certain quarters that a change of format to fully integrated handicap blocks might make life more interesting for the local high bisquers in that it would afford them the chance to play more varied opposition, since the majority of the visiting players were in Block A. Just a thought

With Block B being assigned to Courts 3 and 4 I wasn't very often in a position to personally observe the play there. However, scanning the results sheet late Sunday afternoon revealed that Roy Tillcock had tidily won all four games and thus emerged as undisputed victor, unlike certain people whom I am about to mention . . . ! You see, Block A ended up with three people on four

wins each, which led to much head-scratching over the intended meaning of Regulation 16(c)(iv)! I confess - it was all my fault; Shaun Carter and John Hatherley were all nice and neat on four winds each until I beat John and ended up with four wins as well, whilst not having played Shaun. Upon the decision to settle the tie by shooting at the peg it promptly began to rain (under Regulation 7351 (z)(xviii) of Murphy's Law, I expect), but since all three of us wear glasses, fair enough! Stuart Orr (who earlier had had his own troubles with hitting the peg when he attempted to peg out Les Toye and only succeeded in pegging himself out instead, producing a spurt of rueful chuckling on his part!) was kind enough to volunteer to watch the peg and act as ball-boy. Shaun gallantly suggested "ladies first" (at least, I hope gallantry was the motive!). After six shots apiece Shaun had not succeeded in hitting, while John and I had notched up one each, so then it went into 'sudden death'. I stayed 'alive' when my next attempt hit, but unfortunately for John he 'died' when his shot slid past. So I was very pleased to have pulled it off against some very respectable opposition - and particularly so since it was my first experience of Barlow balls and the sometimes unpredictable behaviour or the backward ball!

In the car on the way home, Laurence asked me whether I would find a way to unobtrusively mention that I was the only lady player in a block with nine men, and won . . . ? My reply was roughly to the effect of "Too right!" - and blow being unobtrusive about it!

SOUTHWICK 6 - 9 SEPT

This tournament was conducted throughout in a very friendly atmosphere, with all those in charge, including even the Manager, Dennis Moorcroft, being very relaxed and accommodating. Only the weather was not so friendly, being worse than usual for the time of year, apart from the first day.

To the Manager's delight there were exactly 32 entries, which suited his plans. There were initially 8 blocks of 4 players, the winners of which were seeded in the knock-out competition that followed. As you got eliminated from that you joined a Swiss competition which was in two groups (None of the seeded players incidentally did particularly well in the knock-out).

The events of Day one were rather overshadowed by the behaviour of one 87 year-old stripling named John Excell, practically unknown in the croquet world since he shuts himself away in Little Cheltenham, apart from winning four trophies throughout the South of England in this year alone. At 9.30 he played Freddie Reynold, the Chairman of the Club. The latter never even took croquet and J.E., gliding quickly around, won by 26. Whereupon he immediately became

extremely ill! I will spare the reader all the gory details - after all he's not Eisenhower or Reagan when all must be revealed, apparently. But he as rushed to hospital and took no further part. (He will play in the Cheltenham October event, he ludicrously assures us.) If he never plays again (Heaven forbid!) what a way to depart from the croquet scene!

There were a few close games ending in +1 or +2, but also some very one-sided ones which were mainly won by good high-bisquers. The Medway Club produced some of these so-called bandits - they mostly swept all before them, unlike their forefathers who were humiliated by the Dutch marauders in 1667 when they sailed up the Medway wreaking havoc. (May I deviate from croquet in just 2 lines - after all, Don Gaunt mentioned it not in two whole pages!) In any well run, but completely isolated club, where well taught players are frequently playing each other in club tournaments, their standard is constantly improving, but since they're winning and losing about equally their handicaps remain static and much too high. That's one reason for banditry.

Back to Southwick. In the final of the main competition Don Mears beat Rodney Parkings in a long and close game. Pat Wayne beat Beryl Irwin for third place. The first Swiss block was won by Robert Alexander. The second was won by Pam Arliss: she had 3 wins as did 2 others, but she won on points.

A final word in praise of all those members of the Southwick Club who did so much to make it an enjoyable 4 days, not least Enid Ross who did such a grand job mopping up the blood

(See para 3). Warning! Croquet can damage your health.

THE SWISS CA VS CHELTENHAM CA

The Swiss team arrived late on Friday evening in high spirits after 'duffing' up the Welsh at Dyffryn. This was to be the return match played on home turf. See Daddo-Langlois's report in the croquet magazine Iss 231 p17, for all the details of last years match. 75% of the team remained the same - with Kibble being replaced by Wainman (he had prior engagements at Edgbaston!).

The format was to be the same as before - sunny, hot, two doubles in the morning followed by four singles in the afternoon and then pints in the evening.

Darby and Golesworthy 'teamed' together against Eatough and Underhill. They were pipped at the post on time as was Eatough by his croquet ball as it rolled off the lawn before he could peg out. Golesworthy failed to make another hoop in the last turn and Cheltenham lost - 1T. The score was then evened by a win for Wainman and D-L +6T.

In the afternoon we spread out over the dry rolling lawns at Cheltenham - all of us having difficulty in maintaining decent breaks. Darby and Wainman played Underhill and Sexton nurturing four wins for England. Three of the

other four matches went to Payne and Eatough, but not even Payne with his attempt to roll 5 and 6 in one shot could stop D-L - it jawed in 6.

On Sunday England started the day on a hopeful 6 - 4 lead. In the doubles D-L and Wainman continued with some convincing play to win +9. The Sexton and Underhill matched that performance in the other game.

In the afternoon Eatough and Sexton convincingly beat Wainman and Golesworthy respectively. Darby and D-L return the overall lead to Cheltenham of 9 - 7. In the final set of 4 matches the Swiss team needed to take 3 wins to retain the honour in drawing the match. This was not to be Golesworthy - ending his tournament with a much needed +2T. Darby only let Eatough have five strokes - but he did also receive a nudge from Upstairs - his ball only just ran hoop 6 leaving a very hampered shot at the pilot ball - on a second glance seconds later his ball had come clear of the hoop. This was all deemed valid by the Cheltenham 'Posse Comitatus'. D-L won +14 against Sexton. They both played well. The last game to finish, Payne vs Wainman, could have no effect on the final result now but Wainman's accurate shooting was outgunned by Payne.

The final result England C.A. 12 games; Swiss C.A. 8 games, hardly reflected the closeness of the match. The Swiss team presented us with a commemorative plate that evening. We all parted with intentions for another meeting of the teams next year. As for the English team we were able to return to our normal lives for a rest, but our guests were to continue with more Croquet taking the shape of the Cheltenham 5 day July week tournament!



John Solomon presents David Maugham with the 'Presidents Cup' at Parkstone - expect a full report in Croquet very soon.