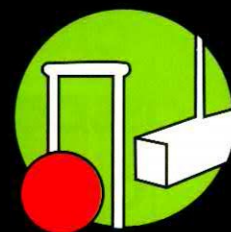


# the croquet gazette



issue 275 - september 2001



reg bamford : the winning machine

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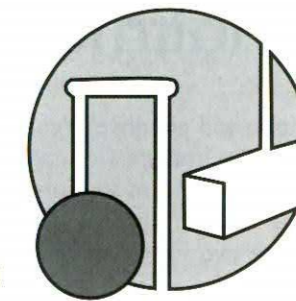
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Front Cover: Reg Bamford in play at the Lincoln WCF World Championship. (Photo by Javier Garcia)

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## chairman's column

Hello and goodbye! Yes, this is my last Chairman's Column. The last two years seem to have flown by, but what a lot has happened in those two years.



I started my job as a brand new Council procedure was brought into operation. Talk about a baptism of fire! However, things soon settled down and now it is working well.

Soon after that came the great news of our nail-biting win in the MacRobertson Shield. I now confess that I had actually written my column already, congratulating the team. I nearly had to do some rapid re-writing! It was good to get a letter from the Queen congratulating the team.

2000 saw not only the many celebratory events but also the production of the new Laws book. I feel a bit of a fraud having my name in the front since others did the real work.

The winter of 2001 changed all that with my visits to the Federations. A lot of miles and a lot of work went into this. It was well worth it, though. I think that in many cases my visit was the first a Council Chairman had made to that Federation. I hope that it will not be the last.

The World Championships this year were every bit as exciting as might be expected. The singles final between Robert Fulford and Reg Bamford was an exhibition of croquet at its finest. Is Reg the best in the world? Will Robert now raise his game to even greater heights? Perhaps there is a new challenger hovering in the wings, as yet unrecognised. Whatever the outcome, croquet can only gain from such excellence.

After such magnificent highs, it was sad for me to have to report a low. I refer of course to the loss of Hurlingham as our HQ. I wish the working party every success in their efforts to meet this challenge.

Best wishes to James in his daunting task as the new editor, and a happy retirement to Gail.

The new directory of members has just come out. A glance through it shows that a good many handicaps are shown incorrectly. This is not the fault of the compiler, he can only put in what he knows. So please check, and let the Secretary know if there are any corrections to be made to your entry.

A big thank you to all those who have worked with me to improve our game. After 15 years I will be leaving Council, but I will not be leaving croquet. I will be concentrating on the development of croquet in Europe through the Federation Europeen de Croquet.

Finally, may I wish Quiller Barrett (I am assuming he will be elected!), every success in his term as Chairman.

**GOODBYE GAIL HELLO JAMES** After six years, Gail is stepping down from her job as editor of the Gazette. May I, on behalf of all croquet players everywhere, thank her and wish her well in the future.

Gail has been editor for so long that many people have never known another, and many of those who have will have forgotten that before her the magazine production was not in too healthy a state. That Gail has lasted for so long is a tribute to her tenacity and determination.

I know only too well that any job in the CA (and almost everywhere!) tends to get all of the moans and none of the praise. In the end one measures success by the low complaint rate not the high praise rate. No-one, even Gail herself I am sure, would say that everything has gone according to plan with the Gazette, but much, much more went right than went wrong. We have had in Gail, someone who cared about her work and did a darned good job. Thank you Gail.

I welcome James Hawkins as our new editor. He takes over as we are moving forward into the electronic age. He has a formidable task ahead of him and a great past to build on.

Don Gaunt Chairman of Council.

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## letters

### a snob's game

Dear Editor,

I am sure your readers will join with me in applauding the sterling efforts of Ian Beecroft in teaching Croquet to Primary School pupils in South Yorkshire. During the years I was the Yorkshire Federation representative on the CA council, I was aware of an almost unanimous consensus that there was a crying need to teach croquet at the youngest possible age in schools.

I was also aware that, whilst Croquet flourished in and around many Northern Industrial Cities, e.g. Manchester, Newcastle and Hull, until fairly recently Yorkshire (the largest county in England) was (with the exception of Hull) a croquet desert. Numerous attempts to set up a croquet club in Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield failed. This was partly because flat land is at a premium in the Pennines. At the lowland cities of York and Hull croquet clubs share lawns / greens with bowling clubs. Unfortunately, as Ian mentions, bowling greens in West and South Yorkshire are crown not flat.

It was therefore with jubilation that I greeted the copy of Ian's letter that was sent to me by the CA. Here was a teacher coaching in Primary Schools in the very areas Yorkshire Federation wished to foster. Quite contrary to what Ian perceives the CA attitude to be; I was told by the development committee that, whilst grants for equipment were not normally made to clubs or individuals, Ian's work was so important that a way should be found, via the local Federation, or a schools budget, if his need could not be met. I agree with him that the ability of his pupils to grasp the tactics of the association game should not be underestimated - children at that age pick things up quickly.

In the event it was not necessary to seek a grant as Yorkshire Federation and local clubs were able to provide what was needed, including some short handled mallets. I am not in favour of applying for grants out of limited CA funds if the need can be met otherwise.

Whilst I am grateful to Ian for his acknowledgement of my help I am embarrassed that I must have failed to get through to him that I was acting as Yorkshire Council Member for the CA and, by default of volunteers, temporary Development Officer. I can assure Ian that neither I nor my predecessor as Yorks Development Officer, Keith Smith, regard his pupils as dreadful oiks, or mining villages as frightful or ghastly. As it happens Keith and I attended the same school for a while in a Lancashire mining town. It was surrounded by working collieries. I cannot also conceive of anyone on CA Council who would be so rude or patronising.

I must therefore conclude by apologising to Ian and the CA for my part in leaving him with an unwarranted sense of grievance against the CA Development Committee. The Chairman, Bill Sidebottom, in particular was very enthusiastic about his efforts. I did, as the then Chairman of Beverley Club, invite Ian to visit us without green fee at any time with or without notice, thus to meet real and ordinary croquet players and get a feel for play on a full size lawn. This mention of Beverley may have caused the confusion. Perhaps I was wearing too many hats.

Due to pressure at work I resigned from the CA Council and as Chairman at Beverley. My successor Colin Fletcher assures me that the offer to Ian still stands. We do not sip pink gins or wear crinolines. That is an outdated image the media enjoy perpetuating, to the confusion of many, and it seems the parents of his pupils.

Mike Evans  
Walkington, E Yorks

### handicap play

Dear Editor,

I have read with interest the recent correspondence about low bisquers and the frustration they can experience in handicap tournaments. Surely one answer is to have less handicap play, and run tournaments on a block basis. That way all would be satisfied as the top groups could play advanced or level play, and the higher bisquers could play

handicap. I believe this is the system in Australia where you play people of your own level but with no bisques.

Frances Low  
via e-mail

Dear Editor

There seems to be an amount of confusion in the handicapping system between handicap ranges and trigger points. This can be elucidated by an example. Bob and Babs join a croquet club and are each assigned 1100 points by their club handicapper, so that they each play off a handicap of 14. They enter their first tournament in which Babs' score is 6-0 and Bob's is 5-1 (because Babs beat Bob by +1 on time). Accordingly Babs' points score goes to 1160 and Bob's to 1140. What are now their handicaps? In their next tournament Babs loses 20 points and Bob loses none, so that their points scores are now both 1140. What are now their handicaps?

Is there a guide to handicappers which would answer these questions?

Bill Gillott  
Watford (Cassiobury) Croquet Club

### hoop-setting

Dear Editor,

The Bristol Club has equipped its courts with the new adjustable Omega hoops (see Gazette 271, pp 16-17 for further details), and I write to give my experience with them.

The adjustment of the Omega hoop is made possible by a screw thread at the bottom of each wire, which is embedded in the carrot. After a few weeks initial use all hoops develop looseness at this joint, which was cured by wrapped PTFE tape tightly over the threads; this made them feel completely firm and solid, but still easy to rotate with the adjusting spanner. Each joint will need to be repacked and greased every winter (taking about ten minutes per joint), but further packing during the playing season seems unlikely to be necessary. Setting out courts is much easier using

Omeegas, especially if one uses the new hole-punch to remove cores which start the carrot holes at the correct spacing, and at the right orientation. Resetting all the hoops on our lawns recently took only about an hour per lawn, the greatest saving of time being due to the ease of adjustment of the clearance on the test ball by the simple process of rotating the carrots in their holes. The occasional stone found in the carrot holes still causes problems, and needs the usual brutal treatment, but the tedious scraping formerly needed to set the hoops by trial and error is unnecessary. One can set hoops much closer than the current CA tolerance of +/- 1/32" - something like +/- 1/100" is easily possible - and checking and adjusting all the hoops on an existing court to this accuracy is usually possible in less than five minutes.

Some who have used "Omega" hoops allege that they are easier to run than ordinary hoops, and there have been several speculations as to why this might be. For our Club members, I believe that the rumour began because it was the first time that we had set the hoops consistently to the 1/8" clearance defined by the Regulations. In fact (pace Tony Backhouse and Christopher Crowcroft, Gazette 274, p6 & p20), there is no evidence from proper tests carried out under equivalent conditions that there is solid basis for the allegation, and my own experience from Tournaments at Bristol (Omeegas) and Cheltenham (ordinary hoops), both firmly set at 3/32", is that I had about the same amount of trouble in both cases.

Don Gagan  
Bristol

Dear Editor,

"Regulations for Tournaments", published in the Fixture Book state quite clearly the following conditions for tournaments:

**Hoop Rigidity** - Must be set firmly and securely such that no perceptible movement occurs when the crown is pushed/pulled with considerable force.  
**Ground Condition** - Local to hoops: Hoops should be set in ground that is level and flat. The jaws of hoops should

be free of "rabbit runs" and hoops' approach areas should not contain defects that will deflect balls from their intended course.

It is regrettable therefore that so many tournament venues fail to meet these basic requirements. We can all name clubs and quite possibly lawns or even the offending hoops where we have been the victims of quite the opposite of the above. In such circumstances the only recourse seems to be "oh bad luck", or perhaps "It is the same for everyone".

Is it not time that players in events demanded better playing conditions, and perhaps that the clubs with the 'hippo traps, mountain ranges and great rift valleys around and in their hoops made an effort to comply with the regulations. Some of the offending hoops have been in situ now for in excess of five years, and others probably longer. Perhaps some gentle persuasion is needed to coax the offending clubs into the appropriate action. My suggestion is a list of shameful hoops, whereby the offending site is listed. Then again someone may be able to suggest some better course of action?

H Potamus (Miss)  
via e-mail

### a cashless society

Dear Editor,

I recently played a game in one of our internal club competitions where neither of us had a coin in his pocket so my opponent tossed up using his credit card. Is this the way of the future in our increasingly cashless society? I would like to suggest that the appropriate calls should be "Face" or "Stripe".

I have just been to watch some of the play at the Easterns, which reminded me that there are a few individuals out there who have already spurned the simple toss of a coin (ie, I saw Richard Hilditch's silly little fluffy die). Are there any other exotic ways of deciding "The Toss" which we may find entertaining?

Colin Hemming  
via e-mail

## editorial

There's no doubt about what my first duty in the Editor's chair should be. On behalf of everyone, I'd like to wish Gail a big thank you. The average reader will be aware of only some of the changes which Gail has introduced to the Gazette over the last six years. The remit of an editor - to please all of the people all of the time - is a difficult one. To do so, and to satisfy the production constraints is a tall order, but one which Gail has fulfilled excellently.

I've deliberately chosen to devote a sizeable chunk of this edition to the World Championship. This is croquet's most important event, not only for the players, but also for the organisation of the game itself. Despite what we see at a thriving club or a fully subscribed handicap weekend, croquet still needs to showcase itself to survive and develop. Canadian croquet has grown by 400% since the press coverage received at the last Championship. The game has grown in prestige in the US, Germany, Egypt and Japan with the selection of players for the event. It is time we valued sufficiently an event of this magnitude, especially when held on British soil.

Much of this month's Gazette is written by me. Ideally, I don't want to spend my whole year at the keyboard, so will always be grateful for any contributions. I've tried to write sufficiently well to avoid complaints, but just badly enough for people to think they can do better. Send me your comments about what you want to read.

Thanks to everyone for their words of advice and encouragement over the last few weeks. I hope we have a long and happy future together.

### disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the Croquet Gazette are those of the editor and contributors. The Croquet Association is not responsible from statements other than those clearly defined as being made on behalf of the Croquet Association.



## news & information

### croquet's top women

Liz Fleming has won the CAQ Ladies Gold medal played at Windsor Croquet Club in Brisbane, Australia. She has carried on from her outstanding performances in England and has reinforced her growing reputation as one of the best players of pressure croquet in the game. Her versatility was evident, in some games the pressure roquet hit at the end of the game to snatch victory, in all games the precision break play was evident and, in one pegged out game, a magnificent fighting two ball break finish.

Liz said she had some trouble rapidly adjusting back to Brisbane lawns and Australian balls after so much play in England at the World Championships but this was not obvious to the spectators.

Our own Gail Curry has made history, with what is thought to be the first sextuple peel completed by a woman in competitive play. Playing Lionel Tibble in the South West Championship at Budleigh Salterton, she performed the six peels and a peg out in a single turn, but with typical ostentation, she did this on the opponent's ball.

Gail has played consistently well throughout this season, and has just won the Barlow Bowl (the CA's top invitation event for women) and been nominated for the Steel Bowl, the award for the most improved lady player in the country.

### world golf croquet championships 2002

The 5th WCF World Golf Croquet Championships will be held at the new National Croquet Center in West Palm Beach, Florida, USA, from 10 to 17 February 2002.

The 10-acre center is being built by the Croquet Foundation of America as the home of the Foundation, the United States Croquet Association, and the National Croquet Club.

The World Croquet Federation, the United States Croquet Association and the National Croquet Center staff are cooperating to make this event a fitting world championship debut for the world's largest dedicated croquet facility.

This will be the first world championship event held at the center, due to be opened later this year. There are twelve courts and the championship will have abundant lawn space at one venue for the usual 48 players.

One benefit of having so much lawn space is the ability to offer more value to players from all over the world. For example, the initial block play will be, for the first time, 19-point games; the top four of each of the eight blocks will go directly into a best-of-three elimination ladder, first-round losers will go into a second best-of-three elimination ladder, and players who lose two consecutive matches will go into a single-game elimination ladder. All places in the event will be decided, from first to last.

Besides the National Croquet Center, other local clubs are helping to host the event - including the Palm Beach Croquet Club at Palm Beach's famous Breakers Hotel, and the renowned Beach Club. Social events will be held at both these venues.

The 5th WCF World Golf Croquet Championships, together with a Croquet Festival from 17th to 24th February and dedication of the new clubhouse, should be one of the biggest events in the history of the sport, from the standpoint of publicity, spectators and sponsor participation.

Golf Croquet is the foundation of the National Croquet Center's promotional effort for the sport. On the day of the finals (February 17th), there will also be finals of the Golf Croquet Corporate Challenge, to which many local corporations will have donated \$1,000 for the USCA's Youth Development Program.

WCF President Tony Hall will attend the event as a player and possibly as Chief Referee. Support staff will include Archie Peck, National Center Director of Croquet, Johnny Mitchell, President of the USCA International Committee, Sherif Abdelwahab, Chairman of the USCA Golf Croquet Committee and Bob Alman, National Center Marketing and Community Affairs Director.

Recruitment of ball-boys/girls will present a special problem and - it is hoped - a unique opportunity as well. The opportunity to serve in a world championship will be offered to high-school students participating in the Youth Development Program.

### club coach qualifications

The new Club Coach qualification is designed for the keen member in any small club where there is no Grade I coach. The course is designed to ensure that beginners and improvers, either in association or golf croquet, are taught in a standard and methodical manner, and therefore encouraged to keep coming back to their club. As the courses are currently run by federations, then anybody belonging to a CA-member Club may apply to attend such a course and be recognised as the mentor within that club. To progress to further stages within the CA coaching hierarchy requires the person to become a full associate member of the CA.

The list of names follows two courses run in 2000 by Don Williamson, and in 2001 by Michael Hague - further courses will be run throughout the federations in 2002.



Chairman of Coaching Committee, Bruce Rannie (right) presenting awards for Club Coaches

# the wcf world croquet championship

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### Report by Richard Hilditch (Manager of the event)

Combining the World Championship with the Open Championships proved to be a great success by any measure. 98 players competed at four London venues, representing virtually every croquet playing country (New Zealand, Australia, Japan, South Africa, Egypt, USA, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Ireland, Jersey, the Isle of Man, Wales, Scotland and England). Moreover the event attracted nearly all the top players from each major nation. With a strong home-based contingent, this transpired to be the strongest tournament of the modern era.

The larger format required a ten day event, with a one day qualifier at Surbiton beforehand for 16 players vying for one of three places in the 80 player singles event. Progressing to the main event were two Australians, Ian Bassett and Liz Fleming, and Sue Hoddy from New Zealand who had a narrow victory against the impressive Magd (Mado) El Sageny from Egypt in the last round.

Friday saw both the start of play at Hurlingham and Parsons Green and the start of the doubles competition (technically the British Open Doubles Championship rather than a world event). The most interesting result was the victory of the Egyptian pair of Ahmed El Mahdi and El Sageny over the Scots Gordon Hopewell and Malcolm O'Connell in straight games. David Maugham registered the first sextuple of the event, partnering Steve Comish against Patsy Fitzgerald of Ireland and Colin Southern at Hurlingham. Most of the seeded pairs progressed to their assigned places but Terry Burge and Jeremy Dyer overcame first Martin Clarke and Alan Sands from Australia and then the top Irish pair of Ed Cunningham and Mark McInerney. Andy Hobbs and Mark Suter from South Africa saw off Greg Bryant and Toby Garrison from New Zealand at Roehampton before falling to the reliable Chris Clarke and Robert Fulford.

Singles block play was held on Monday,

Tuesday and Wednesday in sultry hot conditions at the four venues using 19 lawns in all, each player in the eight blocks of ten playing three games a day. The first day saw Maugham racking up his second sextuple against Britt Ruby from USA. On Tuesday Fulford clocked up a couple of sextuples at Roehampton.

The only undefeated players in block play were Bamford and Matthew Burrow. Meanwhile the following seeded players failed to qualify for the knock-out, Peter Parkinson (NZ), Shane Davis (NZ), Mark Avery, Phil Cordingley, Steve Comish and Greg Bryant (NZ). Their places went to Jeff Dawson, Alan Sands (Aus), Leo McBride (Can), Chris Patmore, Lionel Tibble and John Gibbons. Congratulations are due to the players from minor nations, El Mahdi with 3 wins, Tanaki Nozaki (Jap) with 1 win, Juan Ojeda (Spain) with 3 wins, Roger Beijderwellen (NL) with 2 wins and Jonathon Lamb (Bel) with 1 win.

Seeded players Ed Cunningham, Toby Garrison and Bob Jackson fell to convincing first-round victories from Dennis Bulloch, Jeff Dawson and Chris Farthing on Thursday. The unseeded Stephen Mulliner was also upset by Martin Clarke from Australia. At about 8:30pm a heavy thunderstorm left standing water on the lawns. Sadly the humidity on the later days never allowed the lawns at Hurlingham to dry out for the rest of the event.

On Friday the last 16 was played. Dennis Bulloch pegged two balls out against Leo McBride only to find that he had 'pegged out' the opponent's backward ball which was still for hoop 1. This left his opponent on 1 and peg against his 4-back alone. He lost this game but went on to win the match. Chris Clarke seemed to be in charge of his match with Robin Brown as he just failed to complete a TP in the third game. He pegged out one ball with Robin on 1 and 1. Two careful breaks later and Robin finished +1 to complete the biggest upset of this round. All six major nations were represented in the quarter-finals : England, New Zea-

land, Australia, USA, Ireland and South Africa. Fulford and Maugham shared the first two games with sixth turns TPs. In the third Robert had the first break, David hit in but then there was a hard rain shower. David missed twice (his grip slippery in the wet) allowing Robert to finish with another TP.

The doubles semi-finals comprised all UK based players, 6 of whom play at Surbiton. Clarke and Fulford were pitted against Burge and Dyer. Fulford started with a TPO on Burge, and Dyer got a break but missed a 4-yarder after 2-back. Chris was soon able to hit and finish. The second game was wrapped up with Fulford's third sextuple for the event. In the other semi-final, the other top seeds Bamford and Mulliner overcame Comish and Maugham with steady rain again affecting Maugham's play.

In the singles semi-finals, top rated Robert Fulford took on surprise package Dennis Bulloch from New Zealand, a wild card selection by the organising committee. It turned out to be a close classic, Fulford eventually getting a TPO after a scrappy start, and later finishing with a break. Dennis won a quality second game off the contact from the TPO in turn 7. Robert replied with a seventh turn +26tp. Dennis levelled with an eighth turn +17tp. The decider saw Robert reach 4-back on the third turn. Dennis hit the lift but failed a difficult second hoop. Robert gratefully finished with a 5th turn TP. Meanwhile Bamford was too strong for Fournier who only got one break in the three games. Everything was set for the expected final between these strong rivals.

The first game of the doubles final was held late on Saturday, Clarke TPO'd Mulliner and pegged two balls off leaving 1 versus 1-back. Reg subsequently took on a risky shot at Fulford in front of 2-back from near hoop 2 (which he was for) and missed, letting Fulford finish. The next morning, the second game started slowly. Clarke got the first break and Clarke and Fulford emerged victorious two turns later.

The plate was contested by 56 players (failed qualifiers, block non-qualifiers and losers in the last 32) as a draw and process. In early play Keith Aiton looked to be in charge with both lives going into Saturday, however the finals of the two halves did not include a home based player. Refreshingly Sue Hoddy (NZ) beat Steve Meatheringham (Aus) in one half and Greg Bryant (NZ) beat Kenster Rosenberry (USA) in the other life setting up an all NZ final. This was won by Greg with a TPO but Sue had shown a tremendous performance starting as a qualifier, then knocking out Mulliner with her steady but effective play.

The relatively long gap since the previous world championships may well have increased the availability of the top players this time. Hopefully the mistake of running the event too frequently will not be repeated in future. The combination with an existing event should also not be overlooked.

### the final

The final between Robert Fulford and Reg Bamford lasted precisely 43 turns. Previous matches between the two this year had been split, with Reg winning 3-2 at the Men's and Robert winning 3-0 at Surrey (at their home club Surbiton). Each had previously won the open singles four times. Robert has also won the world championship four times but this was an honour that Reg had yet to achieve.

### lincoln wcf world championship - knockout stage results

FIRST ROUND (\* denotes seed) : \* R.I. Fulford (E) bt M.A. Suter (SA) +26tp +26 ; A. Sands (A) bt C.J. Patmore (S) -23+20+5 ; L.G. Tibble (E) bt T. Bassett (A) -3 +17 +12 ; \* D.B. Maugham (E) bt M.J. McInerney (I) +17tp +3 ; D.J. Bulloch (NZ) bt \* A.E. Cunningham (I) +13 +9 ; L. McBride (C) bt P.C. Trimmer (E) -12 +18 +19 ; M. Clarke (A) bt S.N. Mulliner (E) +18 +17 ; J.P. Dawson (E) bt \* T.A. Garrison (NZ) +13 +26tp ; C.N. Farthing (E) bt \* R.V. Jackson (NZ) -17 +12 +9 ; J.E. Fournier (USA) bt J.W. Louw (SA) -19 +7tp +15tp ; S. Williams (I) bt J.B. Gibbons (E) -13 +13 +13 ; \* B. Fleming (A) bt J.S. Dyer (E) -23 +15tp +17 ; \* C.D. Clarke (E) bt S. Meatheringham (A) +22 +10 ; R.J. Brown (E) bt M.V.M. Burrow (JER) +16tp +16 ; R.N. McInerney (I) bt P.M.G. Hort (E) -4 +10 +26 ; \* R.L. Bamford (SA) bt C.J. Irwin (E) +26tp +26tp

SECOND ROUND : Fulford bt Sands +23tp+26tp ; Maugham bt Tibble +25tp+26tp ; Bulloch bt McBride -4+14+26 ; M. Clarke bt Dawson +3+17 ; Fournier bt Farthing +26tp-17+26tp ; Williams bt Fleming +17tp+26 ; Brown bt C.D. Clarke -25tp+26+1 ; Bamford bt McInerney +17tp-26tp+26tp

QUARTER-FINALS : Fulford bt Maugham -26tp+15tp+26tp ; Bulloch bt M. Clarke +26+21tp ; Fournier bt Williams +6 +26tp ; Bamford bt Brown +7tp+26tp

SEMI-FINAL : Fulford bt Bulloch +8tpo -14otp +26tp -17tp +25tp ; Bamford bt Fournier +16tp+26tp+25

FINAL : Bamford bt Fulford -16tp+17xsp-3+26xsp +26qp

Despite Reg's current shooting form, the final actually turned on break play. (In fact, in the five games, Reg hit only two out of nine shots of nine yards or more, Rob four out of eleven.)



Fulford in play at the World Championship (photo Javier Garcia)

Reg started Game 1 by leaving a mid-lawn tempter. This Supershot Opening seems to be becoming the standard at the top level. Shooting hard and missing gives the opponent the prospect of an early break round, and the chance of a triple peel with only five turns having been played. In the event, Bamford reached 4-back. Fulford hit the long shot but failed hoop 1. Bamford missed. Fulford went to 4-back. Bamford missed again, and Fulford finished with a triple.

Game 2 immediately showed Reg's intent; Robert having gone to 4-back on turn 3, Reg turned down the TPO and completed a polished sextuple on the 8th turn (it seemed that he had saved himself for the big match).

The third game saw both players fail to complete sextuples. Robert had done all six peels, but landed almost in contact with his partner ball after rover. The hampered shot at the opponent was faulted, and Reg made it to 1-back with a sextuple leave. Rob missed, and Reg went to peg with four peels. In an attempt to spoil Fulford's peg-out chances, he pegged out his own ball, leaving Penult (alone) against Peg and Peg. Fulford found an easy wired position. Bamford, having no shot at all, played dead-weight up to Red and Yellow, finding some slope on the lawn and curving to miss by millimetres. Fulford finished immediately.

Now a game down, Bamford played an immaculate sextuple to win, leaving Fulford without taking croquet. Reg took the first innings in the decider, laying the Supershot ball again. Rob daringly shot, hit and approached hoop 1 for an adventurous two-ball break. He failed an easy hoop, letting Reg breeze round to 3-back (a defensive strategy to avoid being peeled and pegged out). Robert missed the key lift shot and Reg finished with a tidy quadruple on the 5th turn culminating seven hours of a fine sports spectacle at 6:30pm.

Details of results in full are available on the CA website at [www.croquet.org.uk](http://www.croquet.org.uk)

# the winning machine

how reconstructing his swing won Bamford the world title

I was at the final stages of putting this edition together, and realised that the one person I'd not spoken to was the new World Champion himself. So, I emailed him. He phoned back and I was out. He tried again. And again. By the time when we finally spoke, I was starting to think that Reg maybe had something he particularly wanted to tell me.

Reg's enthusiasm is evident. When we talk, it's a month since his victory. People are still talking about the final match against Fulford. Bamford has not only beaten croquet's strongest player, but has leapt above him in the World Ranking list to assume Number One position. What has made Reg an overnight sensation is not the win itself, but the manner in which it was achieved.

It was always clear that Reg was the most talented player that South Africa has given to the game. His precision play is second to none. His hitting was always good, but perhaps not up to the likes of Croquet's supershots, Maugham and Fulford. Nevertheless, there he was, hovering somewhere in the world top ten.

Four or five years ago, a drop in confidence affected him badly. He fell immediately ten places in the rankings. Here you think, do I pick myself up and go forward, or do I let my game slip? If the problem is a crooked swing, how can it be sorted out?

Back in the mid-1980s, Eric Solomon published an article in the Croquet Gazette about a swing trainer he'd invented: two pieces of wood forming a channel along which the mallet is swung. The young Reg himself was experimenting with a similar device. The Bamford Trainer provided an adjustable guide through which he could swing the mallet. The theory is that repetition in practice trains the muscles to reproduce an entirely uniform backswing.

Fifteen years later, Bamford started to think that maybe he should work on his follow-through as he had done with his backswing. It is, he believes, possible to hit straight with a crooked swing - just

look at Fulford - *provided* that the striker has perfect timing for each shot. What's needed is a contraption that the player stands over; he swings the mallet, and the sides of the trainer force it to describe an exact semicircular arc.

Bamford drew some designs on paper and handed them to his mallet-maker, John Hobbs. After three attempts, they settled on a design that worked - two plywood semicircles bolted together one mallet head's width apart. This was a year ago, just before California's Sonoma Cutrer Championship. Reg played OK, then went on to dominate the Men's Championship at Cheltenham. If the machine works, it's just a question of perfecting the practice regime.

The after-effects of any practice are short-lived (try playing well after a long gap). Bamford's routine now is to concentrate on the Trainer for just a couple of weeks before an event, but to use it intensively for around 90 minutes a day. He takes 16 balls onto the lawn and fires them at the peg from the east boundary (14 yards). Then he repeats this another eight times. Typically, with the first 16 shots he'll hit 40%. Try it again, and he's up to 50%. By the end of a session, his success rate is approaching



97 - 98%. One witness at Surbiton saw 16 shots hitting out of 16 fired. What was most impressive was the fact that *they all rebounded to within two yards of each other*. The previous record for consecutive hits at the peg was (apparently) 13. Practising for the Worlds, Reg showed an audience of onlookers a success rate of 63/64. A couple of days later he returned and hit 61/64.



That's all very well, but a player only gets to hit the peg once in a game. At the top level, if players are going to finish in one or two turns, success or failure may hinge on just one long shot. There's not a referee in the land who'd allow a player to use a swing trainer at the side of the lawn during a major final. What happens in practice, after 90 minutes of constant shooting, and what happens in a game, when the striker's cold and nervous are two different things. Right now, Reg isn't concerned. For him, a straight swing isn't about taking on 25-yarders with confidence. It's about playing seven-yard cut rushes gently, *knowing* that your swing is perfect.

The statistics for Reg's break play speak for themselves. Over this season he's attempted 14 sextuple peels, and completed 13 of them. His success rate is astonishing - he estimates a 95% chance of completing a triple, and 90% for a sextuple. Compare this with World Number Three, David Maugham, whose sextuple rate is two out of ten this year.

One thing puzzles me. Hasn't Reg got better things to do with his time than spending every evening firing croquet balls at a stick in the ground? Maybe it puzzles him too. He seems genuinely surprised about his own shooting, as if he's standing outside himself watching in disbelief. There's an air of intellectual curiosity as an inventor might have, on discovering a new process. And that seems to be exactly what Reg has done.

So will we be seeing Swing Trainers at the side of lawns throughout the world? Bamford doubts it. If the game's going to stay an amateur one, he can't see any but the top four or five players devoting so much effort to their play. As we part, I wonder what would happen if were to be the aspiring handicap 7's and 8's we all meet in run-of-the-mill weekend tournaments, desperate for improvement, who get hold of a trainer. Now there's a scary thought.

# wherever next?

who will be the *next* world champion?

Almost everyone who was there would agree that the World Championship final marked a watershed in croquet history. If this is the peak of croquet achievement, how can the game possibly get better?

After ten years of domination, Robert Fulford is well placed to predict the future. Perhaps his favoured candidate to inherit the World Champion's crown is the young American Jacques Fournier. Fournier took up the game 11 years ago,



at the age of eight, playing golf croquet at home. By the age of 12, he had claimed fourth place in the US Nationals championship. In those days there were just a couple of International Rules tournaments in the American calendar. Even so, back home in Phoenix his sparring partners included some of the US's finest, in Jim Bast, Ren Kraft and Ray Bell.

Innate talent is one thing - and Fournier's certainly got the technical ability - but without good opponents, few top players may hope to succeed. Here Fulford's quite emphatic. A student in the croquet backwater of Virginia (where Fournier's now based) cannot expect to match the standard of play expected of the next champion. He believes the most likely heir is perhaps a teenager playing constantly on the British (i.e. English) championship circuit.

This exposes a remarkable trend in the game - what might be termed the 'Surbiton Effect'. Around a quarter of the players qualifying for the last 32 in this year's event were members of the same club. They play each other and - importantly - Bamford and Fulford (themselves both Surbiton men) regularly.

A quick scan through the British rankings shows that the top players in this country come from a very small number of clubs; and dominant among those is the hothouse of English croquet, Surbiton. It's not hard to explain how several journeymen of the UK circuit outperformed their overseas adversaries. Prime among these is Patrick Hort, who emerged from his block ahead of such stars as New Zealand veteran Bob Jackson. Indeed Hort's only loss at the block stage was to fellow Surbiton player, Chris Patmore.

So, if there's to be a new figure at the top, it's as likely to come from Surbiton as anywhere. Fulford himself sees no outstanding newcomer on the horizon. Maybe the next five to ten years will see a continued dominance by Rob and Reg. If so, it'll be a run of form unprecedented in the game.

## beyond the sextuple peel

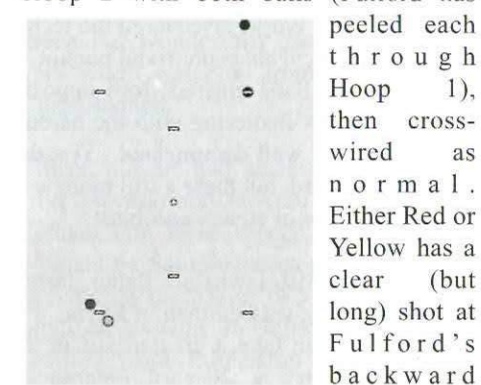
It's thirty years since Keith Wylie shocked the croquet community with the execution of the first ever sextuple peel in competitive play. Its importance as a tactic might pass many lay observers by. In advanced play, taking a ball to the peg carries with it a penalty (the instant loss of innings with a contact) which most players would rather avoid. Stopping at four-back, and finishing with a triple peel eliminates the problem. Against all but the strongest of shots, the TP suffices as a game-winning strategy. Running one-back carries a lesser penalty, allowing one's adversary a relatively short lift shot. And *that* can be eliminated with the sextuple. Finishing with six peels and a peg out means that a player can win without ever giving an opponent a shot of under 30 yards.

The problem is that the sextuple peel is *very* difficult. Only now, in this year's final, have two players been able to demonstrate the reliability of the tactic. As Stephen Mulliner points out, there are possibly signs of an emergent "Bannister effect". Within months of the four

minute mile, a number of other athletes completed the previously impossible feat. If long hitting and multiple peeling become commonplace, how does that dilute the crushing effectiveness of the sextuple strategy?

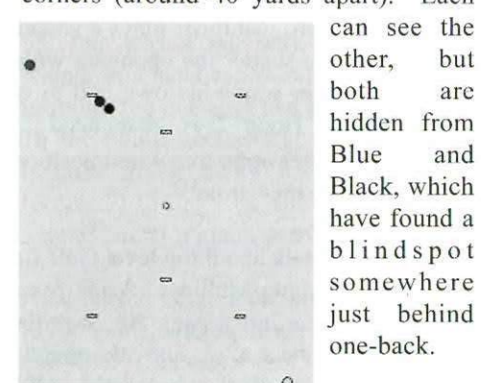
Fulford already has an answer. The standard sextuple leave involves making six hoops, crosswiring the opponent at Hoop 1, and hiding 33 yards away. The problem is that, these days, 33 yards isn't anywhere near far enough away.

Option A leaves the 33 yard shot, but spoils your opponent's chances of doing anything. Fulford unveiled this totally destructive leave against Chris Williams in the block stages of this year's Worlds. Oppo, playing red and yellow, is for Hoop 2 with both balls (Fulford has



peeled each through Hoop 1), then cross-wired as normal. Either Red or Yellow has a clear (but long) shot at Fulford's backward ball, but his other ball is stuffed uselessly into Hoop 3. Even with the long hit-in, a break for Red and Yellow is shockingly difficult to dig out.

Option B is an elegant solution against a lesser shot. Here Red and Yellow are left as near as possible to the two opposite corners (around 40 yards apart). Each



can see the other, but both are hidden from Blue and Black, which have found a blind spot somewhere just behind one-back. The drawback is that the corner-to-corner shot gives an instant break if hit. Perhaps it takes a true champion to assess whether to give an opponent that chance.

# golf croquet

the beautiful game?

There are those among us who don't like Golf Croquet. There are no croquet strokes to worry about, and no breaks to play. You only get one shot per turn, it's all about hitting straight, so surely there's none of the tactical finesse of Association Croquet.

No. That's not quite right. Time was when Golf was treated just as a means of giving new players something to do after Week Two of the Beginners Coaching Course. Jump shots were illegal, for fear of lawn damage at the hands of incompetent players. This defeatist rule forbade both aggressive play, through running angled hoops, and the defensive tactic of placing balls mid-jaws, to try to force an opponent to rush-peel the striker.

Since then, the World discovered the technical virtuosity of the Egyptian game. This is no trivial pursuit. Big jump shots, long angled hoops, balls cleared from opposite corners. Tales of balls and hoops shattering with the hardness of the Egyptians' hitting are now well documented. Yes, the Egyptians do strike the ball very hard, but there's still more subtlety about the game than 75 minutes of smash-and-blast.

For a start, British lawns are flatter, faster and provide a more uniform playing surface than in Egypt. Positional play is more reliable, and can take a greater part in the game. Forcing an opponent to try a 20-yard clearance leaves the striker vulnerable; tapping their ball a foot into a wired position gives them no means of attack. Balls can be trickled into positions just in front of the striker, or just behind to hamper the next shot.

Don't get me wrong. Hitting a ball straight is paramount. But between two equally good shots, the game comes down to something else. Whichever player can control the territory around a hoop will score every time. If both opponents are sent to distant corners, the striker can scarcely fail to run a hoop with one or other ball. Mulliner plays a sound game here. It's not good enough to scatter the opponent with a straight stun shot. Often the striker wants his own ball to come off at an angle. Knowing that Hoop 2 is guaranteed for your partner, it's possible to scatter oppo to a wired position, *and* get position at Hoop 3 in the same stroke.

It's difficult to talk about top level Golf Croquet in this country without mentioning Mulliner. Aside from Fulford, there's no one who can run him close. Ah, says the Association player, that's because he's a -2, and his opponents all have double figure handicaps. Well, not exactly. Mulliner is a better shot than most of the rest of us, it's true. But this year's Open Championship saw him pitted against Trevor Bassett, Australia's Number One (Association) player. Bassett's no mean hitter of the ball, but went out to him in a 7-1 loss.

The Opens saw Mulliner undefeated in any single game in either the block or the playoff, until the final itself. Colchester's Chris

Sheen had been the first player to take Mulliner even as far as the 13th point (the sudden death decider). Meeting Mulliner in the final was Derek Old from Belsay Hall in the North East, who on devastating form had won Golf Croquet's top prize of £500 at Ramsgate the previous weekend. At Budleigh's Opens he did, in fairness, keep Mulliner sufficiently at bay to force the champion to the third, deciding, game.

On current form, Old is our top dedicated Golf Croquet player. I played him at the block stage of the event, and gave some of the best hitting I've ever mustered. I hit every eight yard clearance perfectly. I ran hoops from boundaries. My positioning was the best it's ever been. Hang on - he's a handicap six, and I'm playing just like I used to, to Minus Whatever. These Golfers aren't supposed to be *better* than us Associates. But Old is steady, he's accurate, he's tactical and he's got the best touch of any of the just-Golf players. At this standard, it's difficult to think of many Associates over -1 who'd give him a run for his money.

Certainly not Trevor Bassett, who played the shot of the Championship against him, to no avail. Bassett's Red is jawed at 4-back. His partner ball clears Blue, and lands in the jaws of Penult. A guarantee of two hoops, game and match. Old ignores the 4-back ball, and clears the partially wired Yellow, conceding 4-back, but taking position at Penult to win.

The tactics are improvisatory. There's no such thing as a standard turn as in Association Croquet. I can go into an Association game with a preset strategy, follow it and win. That'll do me no good in Golf Croquet. Despite what everyone says, there are tactics, and they are quite deep. Shouldn't we value it as such?

### publications available from the CA shop

- Know the Game £4.95
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- Croquet by John Solomon £9
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# tournament round-up

## roehampton vs CA select

in celebration of the centenary of Roehampton Club

by Bruce Rammie

The 100-year-old Club was arrayed in all its glory in the sunshine, being fully prepared to play its part in the Lincoln World Championships that were about to start, when the CA Select team arrived to take on Roehampton on 30 June. The teams comprised eight players at any time - Roehampton had selected two complete sets, whilst the visitors changed one member from the morning joust to the afternoon. The format was two doubles and four singles handicap play in each session, divided by a sumptuous celebration lunch and kind speeches by David Mooney (Croquet Section captain) and Derek Trotman (replying on behalf of the CA).

Throughout the day, the doubles ties kept the interest of players and spectators, especially students of tactics - does one shepherd the junior partner around, or get the points on the board? - if Paul MacDonald or Alan Oldham is your partner, then how can he be the junior? All four ties went to time, all went to the CA side, with a *total* of nine points difference over the lot!

The singles were a little more one-sided, although not usually completed quickly. Nigel Aspinall and the ground staff had prepared the courts and the hoops for the Championships, and the speed and width respectively caused some difficulties, compensated for the visitors by the pure pleasure of playing on such a surface. Marcus Evans, the 2000 All-England winner, played twice, and showed why he is one to watch at 16 years old. Pauline Healy came in as an afternoon star for the home club, and showed Bill Arliss what happens if you miss. The only timed result came from Nigel Graves, who overcame Peter Siddall by two in the end. Other singles winners all came from the visitors, who ran out 11-1 victors, but nobody was really counting!

Each CA select team member was thrilled to accept the invitation to play in this

event, part of the season-long celebration of the Roehampton centenary. Our day will be further remembered when we peruse the stylish history of the Club, a copy of which was presented to each of us. With the top twelve players accepting their invitations to play in August, Roehampton's birthday party reaches its climax.

## parkstone 50+ mid-week tournament

by Bill Arliss

The popularity of the over 50s tournaments continues to increase and this event was over-subscribed well in advance. The event was arranged as a seven round Swiss and a full field of 20 players competed. After the recent hot and dry spell, the lawns were extremely fast and Manager Bill Arliss had requested the higher hoop tolerances to assist in completion of the games. Three games were played on the first day with reduced time limits of 2 hour and number of hoops played reduced by the Bray system. This arrangement appeared to work quite well as the majority of games were finished on time. Two full games were played on the following days.

Two local players David Nicholson and Peggy Nutland plus visitor David Bourne emerged quite early as potential winners with Peggy and David Bourne only dropping a single game. The seventh round produced a meeting between David Nicholson and David Bourne, which was effectively a final. A win for David N would give him the title with seven from seven but a win for David B would have given him the title on a 'Who beats whom' basis. David N triumphed with an unbeaten record.

David Nicholson only started croquet last year after an horrific car accident and even now has to use a walking stick on court. He came down from 20 to 9 last season and is still on his way down being reduced from 8 to 6 at the end of this tournament. I am sure that with his high accuracy and thoughtful play, more handicap reductions are on the cards before the end of the season.

Second place was still not settled until Peggy Nutland successfully won a sudden death finish against Pam Arliss. There were three players with five wins but John Lonsdale was awarded third with his very high net points.

## edgbaston july handicap weekend

by Nelson Morrow

Each year I try to set a goal of trying to play at a croquet club I have never played at before. This year it was the turn of Edgbaston.

We arrived after lunch on Friday to find a club surrounded by mature trees and 3 green but wonderfully flat lawns and a very warm welcome from the manager, Chris Bennett.

Fifteen players had assembled from near (five players) and far (ten players) to be divided into three blocks, to find block winners by Saturday evening. By the end of Saturday there were two players in each block on 3/4 wins. In Block A; Noel Davis (4 1/2) from Edgbaston and Christine Osmond (6) from Surbiton. In Block B; Ivor Meredith (11) from Edgbaston and Brian Christmas (6) from Shrewsbury. In Block C; Last year's winner, David Bourne (11) from High Wycombe and Nelson Morrow (0) from Hurlingham. On a who beat whom basis Noel, Ivor and David went through to the semis, with the best runner up. This was decided on points scored and Brian had the most. (I never felt this was a fair way of deciding a winner in a handicap event and suggested in future the manager use a method I use. To the points scored add the number of bisques given away less the bisques received.) In this case Brian was still the winner but by a much narrower margin.

Noel played Brian and David played Ivor in the semis, with the final between David and Noel. This was a very one-sided affair with David winning +26 and a deserved handicap reduction to 8. He could have also won his bronze medal but stopped at rover for fear of being pegged out. Chris Osmond was the worthy winner of the consolation with 5/6 wins, one game only

lasting 34 minutes. The writer of this missive had to retire with a pulled back muscle and therefore was given the honour of writing this report.

With names like Noel and Christmas and the warmth of the hospitality we received, you can not help but have a happy time at Edgbaston.

### surbiton speed doubles

**Gina Lewis loses keys and title**

by Parodista

The fifth Speed Doubles tournament competing for the Nelson Morrow Tray over eleven games plus final, was held at Surbiton on 12/13<sup>th</sup> May, the first really hot weekend of the summer. All eyes were on Philip Eardley and Gina Lewis to see if they could win this event for the fourth consecutive year, having lost to date a mere five games out of thirty seven.

If croquet is fun, then speed croquet is really fun. It was nice to see the Surbiton courts alive with movement, excited voices and laughter. But the Association Croquet played was fiercely contested - what else with intensely competitive players such as Joe King and George Noble? The latter incidentally managed between games to weed the entire length of the new flower and shrub bank flanking Surbiton's seven courts.

Speed croquet is physically demanding and demands aggressive tactics and quick, clear, decisive thinking. Playing two and three ball breaks is essential to make the best use of the thirty minutes allowed on court for each side. There is absolutely no time for protracted defence; the art of taking calculated risks is foremost. It is not a sport for the faint hearted. Teamwork is fundamental, a husband and wife pairing not being recommended unless the marriage is unusually sound.

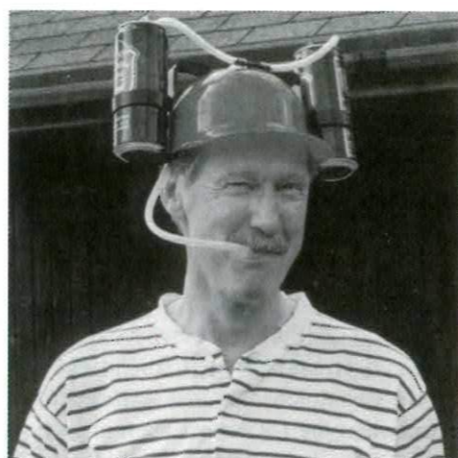
Player/manager and trophy-awarding Nelson Morrow assisted his partner with an endless stream of instructions. The partnership seemed to progress a lot more smoothly once the player concerned had had the good sense to switch off his hearing aid.

Samir Patel and Douglas Burns led at the end of the first day's play with five wins from seven matches, just one win clear of three other teams including the reigning champions.

But the main drama of the first day came later still towards the end of the evening barbeque when Gina Lewis announced that not only had she lost her car keys, but that her house keys were in her locked car. A frantic search ensued in the gathering gloom around and across the four courts used for the tournament. It was in the main conducted by the male members of the club galvanised into action by the thought that they might just be landed in the predicament where they had to explain to their beloved why they were bringing home an unannounced female guest to stay the night when they were thought to have been playing boring old croquet! The RAC was summonsed. Just as Knights of the Road (average response time 27 minutes) made their appearance one hour and twenty minutes later, Gina emptied her handbag for the tenth time for all to see. No key. "Does your handbag have a secret compartment or something?" "No" was the curt response. "Typical stupid male question" thought Gina bitterly but at the same time feeling a hard lump in the lining of her handbag. From a little zipped up pocket "never seen before" emerged the errant key!

Speed Croquet is the nearest thing to a spectator sport that croquet has. Nobody missed watching the final of Kevin Carter and Samantha Symons versus Andy Dibben and Mike Lambert. The latter team had the benefit of three and a half bisques. Just like the 2000 final, it was a cracking match with fortunes swinging one way and then the other. Andy and Mike reached peg and hoop 5, before missing an eighteen inch roquet. Kevin went straight round to peg and also missed the simplest of roquets. Mike ran hoop 5 and rover, failed to peg out his partner, and pegged out his own ball. In stepped Kevin with a sensational hit-in from the eastern boundary and while Andy desperately shot for peg, missing by a hair's breadth each time, Samantha calmly two balled it home to victory with some very smooth hoop running.

It had been a great tournament and much



Kevin Carter refuels before Surbiton's Speed Doubles Final

fun. Speed Doubles is exciting and good for the image of croquet. Who is going to be the first to organise a Speed Singles tournament?

### ramsgate handicap tournament

by David Tester

Sunny Ramsgate, with intermittent tropical downpours, four immaculate lush lawns, a friendly dog and bubbly Mary Currie to fuss, superb food with bread pudding for breakfast, were all thoroughly enjoyed by a varied and talented assortment of players over the weekend of 7 - 8 July.

The very flat lawns, with a generous grass covering, provided a spectacular surface that actually played a part in the movement of the ball and were not completely superfluous to it, as seems the modern trend. These fella's do seem to have it just about right!

Evergreen Dennis Shaw, hails from The Compton Club, was a founder member of Ramsgate back in 18— whenever it was, and was the impartial CA referee. The exception was the one occasion that I called him when he accepted a fiver and still ruled against me! He also presented the trophy to Roger Goram and shield to runner up David Tester. Both players won five matches but the champ topped David in the last match by four. Roger's inevitable loss of a bisque was greeted with thunderous applause from the assembled company, especially the player that he whitewashed!

### CA national schools championship

Wolverhampton Grammar School are the new CA National Schools Champions, having beaten Spalding Grammar in the finals at Nottingham on 7 July 2001. The match was close and tightly fought, resulting in a five-all draw in games and a win for Wolverhampton based on points scored (88 to 83).

The teams of four, all boys, played two rounds of singles Short Croquet followed by a round of doubles. All games were played level and with 75 minute time limits. All the players had flair and good promise for the future, when their skills and tactics will improve further. There was excellent hitting-in combined with unusual tactics, including novel openings and a love of straight peels and half jumps. There were few sustained breaks. The best performance was that of Asif Arshad of Wolverhampton, who improved as the day went on, winning both his singles games outright and - together with Ashwini Obhrai - his doubles. Wilson Law put in the best performance for Spalding winning both his singles games. His hallmark opening was to run hoop 1 on turn 1.

The eventual win on points was down to superior performance by all four Wolverhampton players in the final round of doubles, before which they were four games all and five points behind. Asif and Ash managed to win by 14 points to 3, while Joo and Chris lost by only one point, giving Wolverhampton the final edge. Nottingham Croquet Club member Rob Edlin-White presented the trophy to Wolverhampton with congratulations to all



Wolverhampton's winning team : (L to R) Joo Hur, Chris Fellows, Asif Arshad (capt), Ashwini Obhrai

eight players. Both teams expressed a wish to meet up at Nottingham for a friendly later in the season. It is hoped more schools will take part in the Championship next year.

### north west clubs championship

**Southport & Birkdale, 30 June - 1 July 2001**

by Kevin Garrad

The annual North-West Clubs Championship took place at Southport & Birkdale Croquet Club, amidst glorious summer weather. Teams from 12 clubs from the North-West Federation battled over the weekend at Association Handicap, Short, and Golf croquet.

In the Golf Croquet section, host club Southport & Birkdale and Pendle tied on 9 wins each, with Southport taking the title on individual games won. The Isle of Man team came third. In the Short Croquet, Southport again came out on top, with Bowdon second, and Fylde third.

The final of the Handicap section went down to the wire. The two group winners, Crake Valley and Southport played off, and the first two results went one to either team. The third match was on Lawn 1 - in front of the clubhouse - and, with every other game finished, a crowd of 50-60 people watched the exciting finale. Peter Wardle (Crake) was two ahead of Barbara Haslam (Southport) as time was called. Barbara hit in across the lawn, to a loud cheer; and equalised. Peter missed, and so did Barbara. Peter clanged a hoop. Barbara aimed and ... hit the upright! Result, an easy extra-time hoop for Peter, and Crake won the game by +1(t), and so won the match and section. Tremendous stuff!

The results were:-

#### Golf Croquet

1. Southport & Birkdale
2. Pendle
3. Isle of Man
4. Bury
5. Culcheth
6. Kendal

#### Short Croquet

1. Southport & Birkdale

2. Bowdon
3. Fylde
4. Pendle
5. Kendal
6. Bury

#### Handicap

1. Crake Valley
2. Southport & Birkdale
3. Bury
4. Isle of Man
5. Bowdon
6. Pendle
7. Chester
8. Llanfairfechan
9. Fylde
10. Lancaster

#### Overall Positions

1. Southport & Birkdale
2. Pendle
3. Bury
4. Bowdon
5. Isle of Man
6. Crake Valley
7. Fylde
8. Llanfairfechan
9. Chester
10. Kendal
11. Culcheth
12. Lancaster

As a regular "overseas" visitor to this event, can I say how much all the players (in particular my colleagues from the Isle of Man) enjoyed the event, especially the camaraderie and the catering. How am I supposed to lose weight with catering like Southport's? Well done, ladies!

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## talking croquet

Neil Williams in conversation with Bob Alman of the National Croquet Center, Palm Beach, Florida

Recent examples include Reg Bamford at the World Championships in July, 2001, and Gail Curry at the South West of England Championships in August of the same year. Examples of what? Of Croquet Pioneers: people who push out the boundaries of the game by doing something new, unprecedented, despite all the odds. After their high wire acts croquet is never the same again.

Bob Alman would make no claim to be in the same class as Reg and Gail in terms of playing ability:

"I maintain at the handicap 2 level, American rules. That will qualify me for the highest level tournaments - which I can be counted on to lose. Most likely I'll crash and burn in the blocks. So I don't compete a lot now unless I'm in a mood to get clobbered."

So not a great player, then, but certainly a very serious contender to join that small group who have changed the face of croquet, one of the breakers of convention, who refuse to say, "This is how it has always been done, and this is how it must continue to be done."

These pioneers all have one attribute in common: courage - to risk all, to stick with their vision, whatever the opposition. Invariably, they have to fight, not least they have to fight the "I told you so-s," who lean over the gate, puffing judiciously on their pipes as they watch the wheels fall off yet another prototype. You have to ignore them, the nay-sayers - especially when they're right.

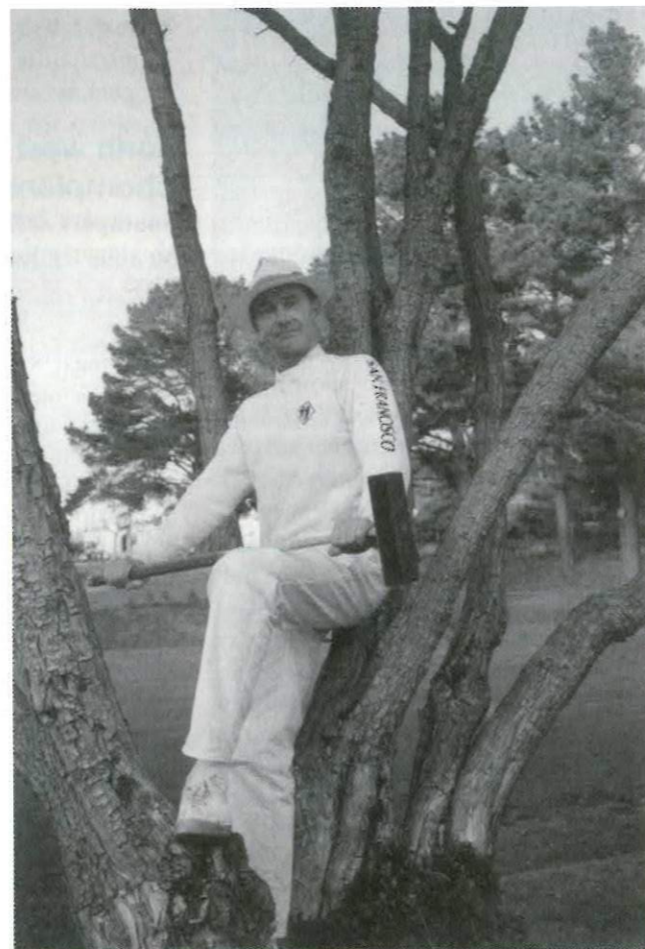
Difficult people some (all?) of the pioneers might be. That is because they grow impatient with us for dragging our feet when they can see no reason for holding back. We can see all the reasons for not attempting sextuples in the World Championship Finals, or for not deciding to be the first woman to go for the same goal - a sextuple in a major event. But the world changes when they bring it off.

From now on, all who dream of World Championships - men and women - will hear the word

"S e x t u p l e! S e x t u p l e!"

echoing round their troubled minds during the long night before the finals. For the Triple is no longer enough. Croquet has moved on and our little world will never be the same again.

Similarly, in the 1980s, huge (for us) battles were fought in this country over whether croquet should expand and develop or "consolidate". We went - thankfully - for expansion and development. And now at the beginning of a new millennium here is Bob Alman with a vision of croquet's future unlike any



Bob Alman on the berm between two lawns of the SFCC, circa 1993. "The pose is heroic, but already there were four players in the club who could beat me badly and regularly."

other in its sheer, Continental scale and ambition.

His core message is that croquet is coming out from behind those high hedges and guarded gates of the American sports club. "Now we're opening the door and opening it wide. This sport deserves to be seen and played by everyone. We'll do our damndest to make that happen."

What makes him think he can do this? Basically, the Can Do mentality he had already demonstrated in California before moving to his present base in Florida. It was there, in California in the 80s, that Bob made his mark. He took over the running of the San Francisco Croquet Club - "a private club with high membership dues and restricted access", where "they were playing on half a putting green and didn't have anywhere to grow".

So they went to the city's Recreation and Parks Department and asked them to build two fullsize lawns on a new site. In return, the SFCC would guarantee "inexpensive access to the club and lawns for everyone".

"Everyone said, 'Bob, they're never going to build us even one lawn. There is no municipal park in the country that has built even one croquet lawn.' I asked the board, 'Is it OK if I try?' They kind of rolled their eyes and said, 'Sure, go ahead and try.'"

The lawns were built on the site of two abandoned bowling greens. The new club was launched. It prospered. But it is the next phase that is the most interesting:

"The SFCC became a laboratory for events and programmes. We tried everything, and of course most of the things we tried didn't work or didn't work well enough to repeat. But by the early 90s we had become a very solid club, even a 'rich' club by croquet club standards."

Some of the things they tried are described in three little books still available from the USCA. These are the Monograph Series on Club Building, Organization and Management.

Then came the even bigger challenge. Bob left California for Palm Beach and The National Croquet Center, featured, you may recall, on the cover of The Croquet Gazette, No.269. Financed and planned by Chuck Steuber, it is due to open for play by early November with the 20,000 foot clubhouse on track for completion in December. The official dedication of the Center coincides with the first major international events - the WCF Golf Croquet World Championship (February 10-17) and Croquet Festival II (Feb 17-24).

Though officially employed there only half-time, Bob was hired "to help launch the National Croquet Center". "That," he says, "is my job. I get to meddle in EVERYTHING, and ultimately I get to choose what most needs to be done NOW, and what it is that I can do best - maybe even what I can do that nobody else could or would do."

His title is "Acting Director of Marketing and Community Affairs":

"The marketing work is the big unknown here - I mean marketing to the public, not marketing to the croquet population. That part is a snap. We're going to be very popular among the croquet population. Croquet players from all over the world are going to find a reason to come here, and we're going to create events and programmes that give them all sorts of good reasons to do that. But the real unknown is how to market croquet to the public. It has never been done. It might be impossible. But I've been here for six months, and I've come to a number of decisions on how it's to be done. There's no question, for example, that Golf Croquet has to be front and centre. No question. We have to capture local corporations and civic and social groups and sell them Golf Croquet Lawn Parties. We have to go after the professional Event Planners and sell corporate team-building events to the incentive travel industry. There's no mystery about what has to be done. I plan

to organise all the marketing initiatives - and write all the associated print materials, load the data bases, set up the administrative systems and the like, and get it all working. Then when I get the marketing thing under control I'll go on to something else."

Why can't you be content to serve just the croquet population? Getting the Croquet Academy started would be enough of a job for the first year, surely, I ask, feeling I'm about to be bulldozed by the massive weight of his enthusiasm.

"We don't have a choice, because we have some big numbers coming at us, like several hundred thousand dollars a year of fixed costs before we do anything...Once we commit ourselves to a 10-acre National Croquet Center, we're playing a different game, a bigger game, and we have no choice but to play it to win. If we don't win this marketing game, we die. This is the best shot this sport has had for a long time; probably we'll never have another chance like this. We've got to make the most of it. From my correspondence with people all over the world, I get the impression that there is a widespread appreciation of the significance of what we're trying to do Chere. I think just about all croquet players will



Bob Alman (foreground) with Chuck Steuber, president of the Croquet Foundation of America, who started the NCC project and has donated more than \$1,000,000 to it; Digby Bridges, British-born architect and designer of the building in the background; Archie Peck, Director of Croquet.

support this project, in one form or another. For one thing, I'm expecting a great many people to come from England for our big events next February. Croquet Festival II will be a truly international event. It will sell out very early."



Bob (lying, front) with victorious San Fransisco players, including US Test Team players John Taves (back left) and Wayne Rodoni (front right)

We will make playing opportunities available here to fit all budgets. In the off-season (May to October), everything is super-cheap - accommodation, airfares and croquet, all bargain rates. Yes, it's hot, but the Center is close to the coast, and if you're looking for a bargain, this is going to be it - especially if you like warm weather."

Born in Quitman, Mississippi, a graduate of Louisiana State University (Journalism), Bob was a book editor in New York and then did corporate communications work for three companies in San Francisco, before retiring prematurely from corporate life in 1981. He joined the SFCC in the 1980s and the rest is....Well, watch this space: it's still all to play for.

Meanwhile, Bob Alman's other job - the one you are most likely to have heard of - and made use of, even - is to maintain not one high-quality croquet website, but three:

USCA Website: [www.CroquetAmerica.com](http://www.CroquetAmerica.com)  
 Croquet World Online Magazine: [www.CroquetWorld.com](http://www.CroquetWorld.com)  
 the new site: [www.CroquetNational.com](http://www.CroquetNational.com)

The first is the official USCA site; the second covers features and news reports that the first hasn't room for. The third covers the affairs of the National Croquet Center. Between them they provide three of the major channels through which croquet is gradually being unified across the USA. Croquet World offers an Events Bulletin Board and a discussion forum; Croquet America carries the Calendar of Major Events:

"If you're planning an American event, all you have to do is check our calendar to make sure you fit into the right place....Because of the online calendar, all these events kind of sort themselves out. If people spot a conflict or overlap, they mostly work it out themselves."

Soon there will also be an Online Pro Shop:

"There just aren't many croquet stores you can wander into and pick and choose. The National Croquet Center will become a major online merchandiser through the Online Pro Shop."

Another potential unifying agency will be the Croquet Academy, part of the Center:

"This is being launched with a year-round schedule of events and courses, beginning with Festival II next February [2002].

In 10 years' time, how will things look?

"I have fully bought into Chuck Steuber's vision for the sport. He has invested more than a million dollars in the National Center, and he says he wants to see 30,000 members in the USCA by the year 2010...But also I want to see croquet covered in the media as a worthwhile sport. I want to see Golf Croquet regularly on television, with significant cash purses attached, and crowds of spectators and sponsors. It may sound crass and undignified, but that is what is needed to gain respect and attention from the public: money and sponsors and televised games."

And if he could change just one thing about croquet?

"I want to see croquet players everywhere enthusiastically embrace Golf Croquet as the entertaining and exacting game that it is - a fully worthy form of the sport that we should be delighted to show off to newcomers, to introduce to novices, to encourage them to play and to excel in this great game - even if they NEVER learn to play Association croquet....If that one little thing would happen we wouldn't need to see out marketing experts. The sport would grow and flourish by itself."

#### time for a new mallet?

You may have seen Len Hawkins' letter about his round bottom in the July Gazette (p.13). Apart from his stop shot problems he did extol the RPM mallet's qualities, particularly describing the swing as "fantastic". If you would like more information about these excellent New Zealand mallets, contact Ron Welch on Tel/Fax: 01843 869326 or email [rwelch.croquet@care4free.net](mailto:rwelch.croquet@care4free.net)

## sports injuries for croquet players

by Bob Burnett, Dip RGRT, MSCP, SRP Chartered Physiotherapist

Bob Burnett is a Chartered physiotherapist who has specialised in sports injuries at his Private Practice in Southport for the past 20 years. He has been playing Croquet for five years, is currently handicap 0, a Grade One coach and an assistant referee.

### 6.warming up

"I can't hit for the first half hour," "It takes me ages to get going," "I'm all right once I've run a couple of hoops," "I can't do anything now, I've been sat out too long", how often have you heard people make this sort of comment? Croquet must be the only sport where hardly anyone spends any time whatsoever warming up before a game. Admittedly some of the blame for this must be borne by the conventions of the game rather than individuals, but individuals can change conventions! Quite frankly, as someone who has been involved with a number of sports at all levels for the past forty years, I find it strange that warming up by knocking a few balls around (well away from hoops so as not to disturb the setting) is frowned upon at so many tournament venues. Can you imagine other static ball game players, for example golfers or snooker players, not being allowed to hit a ball before they embark upon a serious match? For some reason in croquet it is considered "not cricket", but cricketers warm up!

For muscles to work efficiently in a co-ordinated manner, they need to be warm and stretched, with blood vessels dilated ready to perform the work required. They only reach this level of readiness by performing work, i.e. warming up. As discussed in previous articles the group action of muscles is a very complicated procedure and the body mechanics involved in hitting a croquet ball particularly so. One part of one muscle in this sequence not working to full potential will result in a poor shot, the mallet may twist, the line may waver at the point of impact, the ball may be underhit or a hundred and one other things may go wrong. Making sure you are warmed up will not guarantee a good shot, but it will shift the odds in your favour.

Different shots require different ranges of movement within the muscles with varying degrees of strength and speed of contraction. Think of the changes in your stance for example for various shots, your hand positions on the shaft, the angle at which the head hits the ball, the mallet head speed at impact etc., etc. You will not be warmed up for a big pass roll by hitting a couple of stop shot hoop approaches!

The more a physical action is practised the more automatic it becomes. Your brain adjusts to think of whole movements rather than component parts, eventually it does not need to think about it at all. Walking, swimming, riding a bicycle, juggling : all different skills that took time to learn are now easy - croquet shots are just the same. This automatic co-ordination is sometimes referred to as muscle memory. This muscle memory takes a little time to get its act together, it needs time to practise! Can you imagine a juggler or concert pianist going out on stage cold? They practise and warm up behind the scenes to ensure

everything is working as it should.

The warm up period does not need to be prolonged; ten minutes or so will be fine. Do a few knee bends, a few gentle toe touches, a couple of side bends and swing your mallet around your head a couple of times ... then go through your shots. If the manager will let you have a ball or two and a patch of grass, start with single ball shots, hit in a few times and then move quickly on to your croquet strokes. Run through your full repertoire and finish with another couple of roquets. If the manager is still Jurassic and won't let you have a ball, run through your shots anyway without one, and make him feel guilty. To be ready to play you need to go through all your shots.

If you have been sat out for a prolonged period during a game, perhaps pulling bisques for a slow player, have a couple of practice swings with your mallet before you take your shot. You will have cooled down and blood vessels will have constricted again. Your opponents can hardly complain that you are taking time!

The older you are the longer it takes to warm up, and for your muscles to "remember". Muscles become less elastic and responses are slower, blood vessels dilate and constrict more slowly. Take your time and go through your warm up thoroughly.

Apart from the obvious improvements to your game by a good warm up; it will also help prevent those injuries that have been discussed in earlier articles : frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, pulled muscles and all those little tweaks and pains that we feel from time to time during a game.

I have been looking at the warm up from a physiological and not custom and practice point of view, and can see no reason for managers not to include it before every game. There may be other considerations for not doing so, time restraints perhaps, but these should not be insurmountable to a good manager.

If I had been arguing for a warm up period on grounds other than physiological, I would have mentioned things such as lawn speed, type of balls used, home team knowledge, prolonged periods of inactivity by a travelling player, etc., etc., but I have not. I leave those arguments to others.

## obituaries

### Eileen Shaw

All croquet players who have known her will have been greatly saddened to learn of Eileen's death on 1st May 2001, bringing to an untimely end a long, happy and loving partnership with Dennis. No-one who has enjoyed their company at various tournaments in the South of England will easily forget the congenial social ambience which was created whenever they were present - for the pleasures of tournaments are not confined to the winning of events.



*Eileen with Dennis Shaw  
at Compton*

Eileen came with Dennis into croquet in the 1980's, both having previously been very successful in the dancing world. (In regard to this love of ballroom dancing one is reminded of the late Maurice and Aimee Reckitt.) Even the casual observer could guess at this background from their appearance on the croquet court; there was no lumbering or ungainly approach to the scene of action when it was their turn to play. They tripped on in a 'light fantastic way', happy and smiling, be it success or failure to come.

Eileen had a great concern for other people and it comes as no surprise to learn that one of Eileen's major contributions had been her outstanding success in teaching dancing to handicapped children at a special school in Broadstairs. She carried her initiatives over into croquet by starting off the idea of a croquet club at Ramsgate and contributing to its continued success. This was followed up by her encouraging the re-creation of a Kent team for the Inter-Counties Tournament.

Although one cannot record any great croquet playing successes for Eileen other than as Dennis' doubles partner (for, as Dennis tells us, she didn't like playing in the rain), the latter's own personal triumphs were undoubtedly due in no small measure to the loving support that he received from her.

Let us therefore remember Eileen with affection for what she brought to croquet and for making the sunny days even sunnier - not forgetting the attractive hats she wore!

Alan Oldham

### Brian Kennedy

Tyneside Croquet Club has lost one of its favourite characters. It was after competing in the Wrest Park Advanced July Tournament, winning 6/7 (his last game +1!), that Brian suffered two heart attacks within a week.

Born in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne, at 15 he became an engineering apprentice with Vickers-Armstrongs and stayed with the company all his working life. During this time he completed 2 years National Service in the RAF and afterwards, devoted most of his spare time as a Scout Leader, before taking early retirement from work in 1995.

In 1991, it was from a local advert for a "Come & Try It" day at Tyneside C.C. that Brian took his wife along for her to try croquet, but he stayed on then to become an enthusiastic club member.

His enthusiasm was legend - he and fellow member Alan Burn would regularly be playing all day and into the evenings at Cochrane Park - many games finishing in the glow of the nearby street lights!

Brian successfully managed the Tyneside team for the Croquet North league and was a member of the Longman Cup winning team in 1995. As a member of the Tyneside "Angels of the North" and Interclub Golf Croquet winning teams of 2000, he was always volunteering his availability for selection in both formats of our game. His volunteering was one of his hallmarks; he was often seen on the lawns helping newcomers to the game, he was there for club maintenance work when required and his donations to our clubhouse were very generous. He was the main instigator for members to still meet every Tuesday at the Club during our closed season and was also instrumental in helping to set-up the mini-carpet at Dalton Village Hall, Northumberland during last winter. This is the type of character whose commitment and enthusiasm is essential to any well run club and he will be sorely missed at Exhibition Park.

A very much devoted family man and grandfather, Brian leaves wife Alwyn, son Ian & family and daughter Anne & husband to whom we extend our deepest sympathies.

Derek Watts

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The Manor House, 1 Barn Croft, Penwortham, Preston PR1 0SX

## CA news

### development committee

report from Chairman Bill Sidebottom

#### Lottery

Clubs are continuing to obtain lottery grants with the "Awards for All" scheme. John Grant, in his letter published in the May issue of the Gazette, reports the success of Auckland C.C. with their application to buy a mini-carpet. This is the third carpet bought by "Awards for All" grants in the North - a remarkable success story, and a lead for clubs in other regions. The Yorkshire Federation also has a mini-carpet, and it will be interesting to see what impact the ability to play croquet in winter, and take croquet out into the community, will have on the health of the northern clubs. The mini-carpet in the Southeast Federation has been used to very good effect by a number of clubs as a recruiting method but, as far as is known, no lottery application has been made for a mini-carpet by any southern club.

Medway C.C. are to be congratulated on being the first southern club to be awarded an "Awards for All" grant. The grant of £4,376 has been given for the purchase of playing equipment for "Taster Sessions". Grants for equipment have been obtained by other clubs but linked to junior or schools development. In this sense Medway appear to have broken new ground.

The success of Blewbury Croquet Club in obtaining a lottery grant is very good news. Blewbury is the first club to receive a grant under the Capital Grant Scheme - a substantial number of clubs have obtained grants under the Awards for All scheme, which has a limit of £5,000. The difference between the Blewbury application and those such as Cheltenham and Southwick, which failed, is that Blewbury were establishing a completely new club as opposed to improving existing facilities. With all lottery applications the key issue is the need to demonstrate that the proposal benefits the community and increases participation in sport. Blewbury are to be congratulated on achieving this difficult requirement. Blewbury also prepared their case extremely thoroughly. They obtained financial support from a range of local bodies and charities and the backing of people in local sport and politics. They have demonstrated that croquet, in spite of all the difficulties, is not a no-go sport for large grants.

The "Awards for All" has proved to be a successful means for clubs to obtain lottery grants and clubs should be encouraged to apply. Applications for the Awards for All lottery scheme are fairly simple to deal with, are dealt with entirely by the club and decisions are taken within three months. Even though this scheme does not need any input by the C.A., clubs are advised to seek the help of their Federation Development Officer on background information and where relevant previous experience can be found.

Except for Blewbury, the story with applications for the larger capital grants is, unfortunately, so far, one of failure. Sussex County's appeal failed. Given its thorough and well-prepared submission, we await the results of the Budleigh Salterton

club's application with interest.

#### Sport England

Relations with Sport England remain a problem for the C.A. The policy of not supporting minor sports appears to be set, with no support being given for large club developments or help with financing events such as the World Croquet Championships. Sport England have demanding organisational and procedural requirements for all sports, of whatever size, and it leaves minor sports such as ours, with limited voluntary resources, facing the same regulatory requirements as the Lawn Tennis Association. To try and improve our position, a Working Party is being set up to examine all facets of our dealings with Sport England and make recommendations to the Management Committee.

#### Grants to Large Clubs

Following the discussion in the Development Committee on the difficulties the very large clubs were having financing their development programmes, a proposal was submitted to, and approved by, Council giving the Management Committee authority to make larger C.A. grants to the few major clubs in the sport to develop the capacity of the sport to successfully host the increasing number of major home and international tournaments and competitions. Following a meeting with the clubs, it was agreed, with certain conditions, that Sussex County and Budleigh Salterton would be given grants of £6,000, and Cheltenham £2,000. Southport has ambitious plans to increase the number of their lawns to eleven and build a new clubhouse. They plan to apply for a lottery capital grant mid-2002. It was agreed that Southport would be given a grant of between £7,500 and £10,000 if their application proceeds as planned and the project is implemented.

If all four projects proceed, the quality and capability of the major clubs to host events and function as centres of excellence will be greatly increased.

#### Grants to all clubs

The Development Committee have the authority to make grants to clubs of up to £500 to help implement club development projects. Details of how to apply are in the Registered Club Handbook. Now is the time to apply. Applications need to be sent to the C.A. office by early October. Please note that grants are not given to clubs for maintenance or equipment, though separate grants are given to Federations for equipment to loan to clubs. Any club seeking equipment should therefore approach their Federation.

Grants for schools development projects are also available. In each of the past three years, grants of up to £150 have been given to between six and eight clubs and individuals. Where equipment is being sought, the route is through the Federations.

**Gateball**

Southport and the C.A. have jointly purchased a gateball set. Southport intends to use gateball as a means of access to schools and other groups. It will be publicised as a separate game to croquet. The club hopes to generate sufficient interest at school and junior level to make it a main theme of their lottery application in 2002. The objective is to integrate gateball into the club's activities and thereby strengthen the croquet club. Progress with the game will be publicised and opportunities will be given to other clubs to experience the game. To support schools development further, the C.A. have, in 2001, also purchased and loaned four Kiwi croquet sets for schools.

**croquet holidays in Austria 2002**



The Development Committee of the Croquet Association has taken up the suggestion of John Grant of Croquet North Federation to examine the possibility of overseas croquet holidays. As a result, the SE Croquet Federation had put together two seven day croquet holidays in Austria, the first 25th May to 1st June 2002 and the second 28th September to 5th October 2002.

The location will be in the beautiful Province of Carinthia on the southern side of the Austrian Alps, southeast of Salzburg and near Klagenfurt, a picturesque area of green valleys flanked by hills and mountains rising from 2000 to 3000 feet above sea level. The hotel is the Dienstl Gut with its relaxed and peaceful family atmosphere, excellent accommodation and recreational facilities and most importantly, first-class cuisine.

The full board price of £49 per person per day includes free use of all amenities such as the mini-gym, sauna, steam room, sun bed, tennis, mountain bikes, natural swimming pool (the latest in environmental landscaping) and of course, croquet. The only extras to be paid for are drinks from the bar and horse riding. An enhancement to the holiday is the fact that the charming young staff and most of the other guests speak excellent English.

There are two short and one three quarter size courts of parkland and wire hoop standard, not for level play in more than one sense of the word! So each week will be a balance of coaching and competitions aimed at the Higher Bisquer (12 to 20 although all will be welcome) and optional sightseeing excursions. The latter include two half day walking and cycling

tours in the blissful countryside surrounding the hotel, a half day visit to the nearby ducal capital St Veit and its neighbouring fortress, the Hochosterwitz and a day trip to include a guided tour of the historic centre of Klagenfurt and sightseeing on the Worthersee.

Travel costs about £150 from Gatwick to Klagenfurt or Stanstead to Salzburg and a spectacular train ride through the Austrian Alps. The number of players will be limited to 16 but non-playing family members and friends will be most welcome to join in all other activities. The emphasis will be on relaxation, informality and enjoyment.

Further details are available from Michael Hague (Tel: 01483 776190 Fax: 01483 776227 E-Mail: MJ.Hague@virgin.net). Accommodation at the hotel is limited to 24 bedrooms and early reservation is advised to avoid disappointment in joining this exciting new venture.

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**tournament committee**

**report from Chairman Derek Trotman**

During the last year the Tournament Committee has held three meetings and discussed an enormous range of topics which have resulted in decisions which may affect the future Tournament Scene.

First we have looked at the replies to the questionnaires which were sent out to Federations, Clubs and Individual members. The returns from the first were excellent, the second fair, but the last extremely poor. However the main conclusions we were able to draw from the returns were:

- 1) There is an enormous amount of competitive croquet organised in the Federations and Clubs which does not appear in the CA Calendar but satisfies the playing requirements of the many club members who do not wish to travel large distances.
- 2) The competitive programme at many clubs has reached saturation point and they would be unable to accommodate any extra inter-club competitions on their lawns.
- 3) Some interest was shown by members in the extension of a one-ball Championship, a B level Championship and an occasional Millennium type Club event but as a number of these returns were accompanied by a request for the events to be played at holiday periods it was difficult to see where they could be fitted into the Calendar.

Other points raised are being dealt with by the Directors responsible for the CA event involved and these include a possible changed format for the Ladies Selection Event and for the Open Championship. Questionnaires are being circulated to CA members likely to be involved in these events.

At our last meeting we found ourselves faced with a unique situation that four manufacturers have obtained Championship approval for their croquet balls. From the moral and legal position we must allow Clubs purchasing any of these balls to use them in their Club Tournaments advertised in the Fixtures Calendar, providing they declare them in the 'Conditions' for the event. We realise the final choice on which balls are purchased will be a commercial one and for this reason and because we are satisfied the playing characteristics are similar we shall be using Barlow GT or Dawson 2000 International in CA sponsored events in 2002. By agreement with the Chairman of Selectors the Dawson balls will be used in this years Spencer-Ell at Southport as this will enable us to obtain further feed back from 'A' class players.

There are a number of topics which turn up regularly in the croquet world and one of them 'Ball clearance in Hoops' is once more with us. This renewed interest may have been brought about by the introduction of the 'Omega' Hoop at a number of clubs. Although this hoop represents a technical break through and a blessing to the club hoop setters there is an impression amongst players that they are easier to run than 'normal' hoops. The Equipment Committee is investigating the situation and we await their conclusions. In the meantime the Tournament Committee has requested that tournaments are not played with a mixture of hoops - please use all Omega hoops or all 'normal' hoops. Whether it is a knock-on from this or players have been checking hoop clearances more frequently, we have been receiving reports of hoops set below the 'Guidance minimum's' in the Tournament Regulations without any prior

notice being given to players before the event. The Tournament Committee accepts that ground conditions can affect hoop running and that clearance may be adjusted to counteract the problem but only if prior notice has been given to those competing in the tournament. It has therefore been decided that as from the start of 2002 season the clearances of hoops in CA events can only be changed from the values given in the 'Guidance note' in the Tournament Regulations (Appendix 1) with the permission of the Director for that tournament and the change must be announced before the event starts. For Club organised tournaments the decision rests with the Club but in this case we expect a notice informing competitors of the change to be included in the 'Conditions' for the tournament in the Calendar. Much of the trouble should be avoided in the future if the Tournament Referee undertakes his/her duties as specified in Tournament Regulation R1 (b) and checks the hoops on the first morning of the event.

The Tournament Committee are aware of the need to encourage clubs to maintain their facilities to the highest standard possible and have therefore supported the Council's initiative in making financial assistance and help with the preparation of Lottery Grant Applications available to the 'Large Clubs'. We also recognise the need for financial assistance to clubs for lawn maintenance and have recommended that Lawn & Ball hire should be increased in 2002. (This however may have to go on hold until the financial implications of the move from Hurlingham have been fully assessed). In return we shall expect the hoops to be set in new holes and the lawns cut immediately before a weekend event and further cuts made during a week tournament.

These requirements will be circulated with the 'Bid Sheets' for 2003 and 2004 which will shortly be sent out to clubs. The object of maintaining this advanced Tournament Programme is to establish a regular schedule for CA events so that clubs running them have time to organise them properly and clubs not involved can avoid clashes with their own events. The CA programme with the names of clubs allocated the various events will be placed on the CA website as soon as it is finalised.

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