

The Bears

Newsletter – December 2014

Change is afoot – Your Chairman's position.

Why do I believe that all croquet players should be members of the Croquet Association?

In many, if not most sports, it is the norm for anyone joining a club to become members of that sport's governing body automatically. The current position in croquet has emerged over time so that now many club members do not see that the CA has any relevance to them. I disagree and would argue that **every** croquet player derives **direct** benefit from the CA.

What does the CA do for me?

Let's start with croquet clubs

In England, there are 198 clubs and over the last 10 years, 80 clubs have received nearly £200 000 in grants from the CA and 15 clubs have received interest-free loans totalling more than £28 000.

Particularly, 48 **new** clubs have benefited from CA help.

The CA would like to help more, especially in supporting new clubs, but are limited by the amount of money available which comes each year from members' annual subscriptions. CA member clubs benefit from free Public Liability Insurance which reduces the need for individual clubs to buy it separately.

Let me move on to individual members

Individuals also benefit from the work the CA does.

The CA is run by just three part-time employees but backed up by over 60 volunteers – experienced in their field, who work in committees specialising in coaching; handicapping; tournaments; game laws and regulations; club development; equipment and playing surface development; ICT; international liaison including tournaments; investments; marketing and publishing. Looking at that array of skill, the support for both clubs and individuals is immense – whether they be just starting out, developing what they already have, or right through to development at the highest level. It is the purpose of the CA to support, encourage and work for the benefit of all clubs and individuals - not just those who enter tournaments.

What of the future of croquet?

Many clubs are coming under enormous financial pressures – what with increases in grounds maintenance and Local Councils looking at the use of existing sports facilities – to say nothing about having to continually recruit new members.

Many clubs are responding positively to these pressures – but everyone needs help, assistance and guidance – and that is where the CA is a vital part of our future.

Some people may want to keep the status quo – but in today's rapidly changing world, this is not a feasible position.

To secure the future of our game, we cannot stand still, we must all work together to secure all our futures.

So why is the CA so important to us all?

I feel that without a strong and effective governing body, the game we all enjoy would be the poorer and everyone should support it.

The CA Council, comprises high calibre individuals who are also experienced croquet enthusiasts and who work hard for the benefit of all. It is a “listening” organisation and we have seen the lengthy consultation over recent years before any decisions about change are made. Perhaps we have had too much information all at once and have been confused by peripheral but well-meaning suggestions such as “Pay-to Play” and “everyone should receive The Gazette”. In my view, the former was never going to gain support and the latter was little more than a side issue but with the good intention of ensuring everyone was better informed. Unfortunately, in the CA's attempt to pass on all the information, many people got sidetracked on these topics rather than focus on the main arguments for change and the very positive work the CA does.

Why not keep the status quo?

In an article written by Jeff Dawson for publication in next month's Gazette, he writes “(The CA) Council is particularly concerned about what is likely to happen in future years. All the signs we can see from our surveys of players, as well as feedback from clubs and Federations, show that the croquet landscape has changed significantly over the last 10 or more years. It continues to change. We have fewer players who are interested in playing in tournaments away from their home club, and a growth of social players and those who play in Federation leagues only. At the moment, the CA's finances have not been too badly affected. This is due in part to the loyalty of our individual members, many of whom continue to pay for membership long after they have ceased to be active tournament players. However, we cannot expect this to continue. Council anticipates that tournament-related revenue will begin to show a more marked decline if these trends continue so action needs to be taken now if the CA is to continue to develop our sport, both to address the financial issues, and to try to reverse this trend.”

I will reprint the whole of Jeff's article after it has been published so that all our members can read it. I would, however, ask you to study it carefully and not scan it because the detail is important.

Finally,

I see an effective sport's governing body as essential, inspirational and most importantly, relevant to all. I see no conflict of interest between federations and the CA. It is widely acknowledged that the South-West Federation is a strong and effective organisation yet I have neither heard nor seen anything to make me feel it is threatened in any way. My view is that individuals, clubs, federations and the CA are all valued partners and that by working more closely together the sport will be healthier for everyone.

The CA will be calling a Special General Meeting, probably in late March to vote on constitutional changes. Full details will be published in The Gazette nearer the time. Considering all the above, I am minded to support the move to encourage all players to be CA members and, as an individual, will be voting for it when the time comes.

Robert

Feedback from the South West Federation AGM.

1. Both Don's achievement in winning the Veteran's Tournament and Caroline's achievement in being the best female improver were celebrated in the chairman's address.
2. Julie Horsley has retired from the post of secretary after eight years excellent service. There were no nominations to replace her so the federation is currently without a secretary. All club representatives were asked to trawl through their club's membership to see if anyone would be prepared to take on the role.
3. At the 2015 AGM, Sue Mackay will be retiring from her post of Publicity Officer and so nominations are sought to replace her. It is possible that her role could be divided between two people: one to become Webmaster and the other to take responsibility for editing the SWAN magazine.
4. The League Secretary indicated that there was consideration being given to a change in B League points. Currently, 5 points are gained for a win in a 14 point game on large lawns. This is being reconsidered by the CA Handicap Committee and may be increased to 10 points. The SWF has made representations to the committee in favour of this change. But, they have also recommended that all B League games should be played on small lawns. It is just possible that a change could happen before the start of next season.
5. Short Croquet is gaining in popularity. The Nailsea event is timetabled for 11/12 April and the new Budleigh event for 17 or 18 October 2015 (one day only because Budleigh has so many lawns)
6. Team captains are asked if they will allow their mobile telephone numbers to be printed in SWAN in order for improved communication if, for example, a team is delayed by traffic and the home team is already en route to their own club. **Team captains will need to respond to this request – negatively or positively. Please inform Robert.**
7. A Coaches Qualification Course is to be held at Cheltenham on 7th and 8th March. This is for anyone considering becoming a coach. Contact Robert for details.
8. A Referees Course is being held at Budleigh in early November. Contact Robert about this one, too.)
9. One club reported “appalling behaviour” at a league match when someone accused a player of being far better than the declared handicap. Despite being shown the evidence that the automatic handicap system had been correctly employed, the accuser continued to berate the innocent party. A motion to make such behaviour illegal was defeated because it was considered an isolated incident but the entire meeting was horrified by the behaviour described.
10. Peter Wilson has taken over as chairman of the CA Marketing Committee and is keen to talk to all clubs and individuals who feel they are doing something well and may have advice to offer.

PROPOSALS. A full list of proposals and outcomes will appear on the SWF website soon. The only ones to affect us are:

SWF annual subscriptions are due on 1st January and MUST be paid by 31st January.

League entry fees will increase by £1 per team (and by £2 per team for Short Croquet)

The visiting team will be given the choice of lawns at league matches.

There is to be a new appointment of an AC Development Officer whose job will be to promote AC in clubs and anyone interested is invited to apply.

The move to amend the handicap range for the Federation League from 14 to 10 was defeated (despite me having two votes!) because:

- a. The winner of the Federation League can play in the Secretaries Shield which has NO handicap restriction and
- b. More than one club said they were looking forward to being able to enter the Federation League for the first time but would be barred from doing so if the handicap range changed. They were eager to encourage their improving players to experience and learn from playing better players.

It was suggested that the Intermediate League be abolished but this did not receive widespread support.

The First 25 Years.

Five years ago, Rosemary wrote a booklet "The First 25 Years ... of The Bear of Rodborough Croquet Club". This is a lovely compilation of information charting the start and development of the club and its members during this time. There are just 6 remaining copies and if you would like one of these souvenirs, a donation to the club's fighting fund will secure one.

How about becoming a member of the Croquet Association?

If you feel you would like to play more next season and if you feel the time is right to start entering a few tournaments, you can join the CA at a discounted rate for the first two years. Membership is just £14.50 for the first year and £28.50 for the second. After that, it will be £43.00 per year. About 12 Bears are already members so help and advice is easy to come by. There are many local tournaments held at clubs we already know from league matches and hundreds more further afield. They range from tournaments aimed at high handicap players right through to advanced level and everything in between. Players new to the tournament scene are always given a very warm welcome and plenty of advice is available so you need have no fear of being unprepared.

What will 2015 bring?

We still do not know what our position will be for next year but your committee is working flat out to secure a new home. Several options are being actively pursued and we will let everyone know as soon as we have anything concrete. In the meantime, we are preparing a draft plan to keep the club active. What follows is just the start. Several clubs have offered

for us to visit for a day or weekend and we will add these in due course but you might like to pencil in these dates for starters:

Diary Dates.

December 2014

Wednesday 3rd Snooker

Thursday 11th Dinner at The Ram, Bussage 7.00 p.m.

Wednesday 17th Snooker - Christmas special

January 2015

Wednesday 7th Snooker

Wednesday 14th Dinner at The Woolpack, Stonehouse 7.00 p.m.

Wednesday 21st Snooker

February

Wednesday 4th Snooker

Wednesday 11th Dinner at Egypt Mill, Nailsworth 7.00 p.m.

Wednesday 18th Snooker

March

Wednesday 4th Snooker

Wednesday 11th Dinner (venue to be confirmed) 7.00 p.m.

Wednesday 18th Snooker

April

Date and venue yet to be arranged for our Annual Dinner

Wednesday 1st Snooker Finale – presentations

Saturday 11th Short Croquet League at Nailsea – Team/s of 4. **Names needed urgently so we know whether to enter a second team. Tell Robert if you would like to play.**

Thursday 23rd Club Day at Cheltenham – from 2.00 p.m 'til dusk (provisional)

May

Thursday 21st Club Day at Cheltenham – from 2.00 p.m 'til dusk (provisional)

June

Thursday 25th Club Day at Cheltenham – from 2.00 p.m 'til dusk (provisional)

July

Thursday 16th Club Day at Cheltenham – from 2.00 p.m 'til dusk (provisional)

August

Thursday 27th Club Day at Cheltenham – from 2.00 p.m 'til dusk (provisional)

September

Thursday 24th Club Day at Cheltenham – from 2.00 p.m 'til dusk (provisional)

October

Saturday 17th Short Croquet League at Budleigh Salterton – 1 Team of 4.

Wednesday 28th AGM (tbc)

November

December