

Reports to SWF AGM 2024

Chair

Introduction

2024, despite the often unusual weather, was again a full and busy year in the South West Federation. All our leagues went well as did the Spring Short Croquet tournament. However, the final day of the equivalent Autumn tournament had to be abandoned due to flooding. The unusual weather and climate change is causing additional problems in lawn management which is something that is affecting all our member clubs.

Congratulations

Congratulations to all the clubs which feature on the 2024 Roll of Honour. Last year it was dominated by Bristol and Cheltenham so it is no surprise that Bristol appear again having won two titles.

This year they are joined by East Dorset also with two titles but the dominant club in 2024 is Bath who ended up with four titles in all the codes. However, it is gratifying that there were five other clubs featuring this year so honours are getting more evenly spread. I was particularly pleased to see my own club feature as a trophy winner after a 20-year gap!

A special congratulation to Garway, a new club in SWF, which reached two finals in one weekend in September – a very worthy effort for a small club. Congratulations also to the Somerset team which won Division 1 of the GC Inter-counties championship and to Glamorgan which came second in Division 2 of the AC Inter-counties championship and has been promoted to Division 1.

Welcome

Apart from Garway, we will shortly see Blewbury as a member. Blewbury is a very active club in the Southern Federation but is joining the SWF in order to take part in our Short Croquet competitions. It joins Broadwas and East Dorset in being a member of two Federations.

Personally, I should like to see all the clubs in our region becoming full members of the SWF as they will have much to gain, even if they don't want to engage in our leagues.

In Memoriam:

With sadness we remember the passing of Pat Oxley (East Dorset), Margaret Peña (Bristol), Roger Thorn (Exeter), Jonathan Wolfe (Tanton Deane) who passed away after a successful day's play at the AC inter-counties tournament, and Brian Shorney (many clubs and later Garway) who would have been delighted with the progress of Garway this year (see above).

A three-year reflection

This is the third year of my term as Chair – how time flies!

I took over from my predecessor, Brian Wilson, after the 2021 AGM. Brian had had the difficult task of steering us through the COVID period for which we are all very grateful. So my first year represented a return to normality with a full programme of leagues and other activities.

SWF is certainly one of the, if not the, most innovative Federation. Beginning with the need to develop coaching as we emerged from COVID, we started our hybrid scheme in which online Zoom meetings deal with the theory and basic information followed up by practical days at geographically convenient 'hubs'.

It took a lengthy struggle before the national Coaching Committee accepted that this was a valid and more modern approach, taking advantage of technology. These courses continue to be well attended and the number of coaches across SWF is increasing each year.

We have also mounted GC referees' courses as there is an increasing need to have people knowledgeable about the GC rules and their application. We added to this by having 'refresher' days for referees to pick up hints and exchange experiences and improve their decision-making. My thanks to Paul Francis who pioneered these scheme and who continues to run coaching and refereeing initiatives.

We started monthly Zoom meetings during the close season for clubs to meet and exchange information and ideas and to address issues of common concern. During this three year period we had a series of 'coaching' presentations by our League Secretary, Stephen Custance-Baker, which were very well attended with around 100 participants present.

Another innovation has been to institute 'job-sharing' in two of our activities. Given our wide geographical spread, it made sense to divide up the Development Officer tasks into sub-regions so that each assistant Development Officer would have a more compact area with which to deal and making travelling easier.

Probably, the most onerous role on the Committee is that of League Secretary. To ease the burden, this year we have instituted a team approach with various people handling the results process for our different leagues and Finals under the direction of the League Secretary. It is our aim to continue this arrangement into the future.

'Job-sharing' lightens the load for everyone and engages more people in the running of the Federation without necessarily getting involved in the minutiae of the Committee itself.

During this period we have developed our Short Croquet Leagues that are becoming increasingly popular. We have reconstructed the GC Level play leagues and also initiated a GC Level Play restricted handicap (5+) league. In part this was to involve higher handicap players in level play competitions and to give these players a WCF 'D' grade which would help in gaining entry to the national tournaments. Again, we had pressed the CE GC tournaments committee to make it easier for people without a 'D' grade to enter tournaments (in line with the CE encouragement for new players to enter). It is pleasing that things are now changing nationally with the use of the GC index where a 'D' grade doesn't exist.

Personally, I am an advocate of graded or banded level play for both AC and GC.

Finally, a more recent initiative has been the institution of the 'Volunteer of the Year' award which features, for the first time in our AGM agenda.

Thanks

I want to thank my colleagues on the Committee for all their activity and support. Special thanks go to Stephen Custance-Baker for all his hard work in running our leagues so efficiently. Even though

Stephen has been nominated to stay on the Committee, I hope that Stephen will remain on hand in the long-term to advise us with all his wisdom and experience.

We were delighted when Mike Rice volunteered to become our Handicapping Officer. Handicapping is always a sensitive issue and it is important that we have someone to cover it. He is setting an example as we would like to see more people offer themselves to join the Committee and help in running the Federation.

And thanks to

- Andru Blewett for the difficult task of Safeguarding and Welfare, which I know was also, at times, a frustrating experience;
- Peter Kirby for keeping our finances in such good order, especially when dealing with our Bank (sometimes another cause of frustration);
- Paul Francis who has carried out two roles as both the Federation Development Officer and our Coaching 'guru' as well as organising our monthly Zooms and combining all of this with his involvement within Croquet England;
- Brian Wilson who is now a Trustee of Croquet England and so can keep us informed about developments at the centre,
- Linda Shaw, our extremely hard-working secretary without whom the life of the Committee would have been impossible. Linda has been responsible for the on-line newsletter, Cygnet, which she has created as an informative and attractive to read production full of interesting and topical items.

Looking ahead

As from this AGM, if all goes as expected, we shall have an all-female team as Chair and League Secretary – another innovation by SWF. I wish Linda and Gill all the best for the future

Tony Mayer

Treasurer

See separate attachment

League Secretary

As you know, I am retiring as League Secretary, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team of people who stepped forward to assist me in the last 12 months. The five League Results Secretaries, Gill Wheeler, Wendy White, Dominic Aarvold, David Warhurst and Nigel Wolcko have kept the processing of results rolling with very little input from myself. Tony Mayer has done a great job as Finals Secretary, arranging the venues, sorting out the trophies and procuring the award plaques.

Gill Wheeler has very kindly agreed to take over the role of League Secretary and will therefore have the task of coordinating the activities of this team into the future. I wish her all the best and urge you to make her job as simple and straightforward as possible.

Another person who deserves special mention is David Harrison-Wood. During September and October, he carried out a meticulous editing of the SWF League Rules for AC, GC and SC and has brought them back to the level of consistency and accuracy that they used to have.

Main Report

The leagues in 2024 were slightly larger than in 2023 with 136 teams from 29 clubs. There were 326 block matches and 15 play-offs.

All of the play-offs and finals were completed on schedule.

- All but one of the finals were very close matches, with the result decided by a margin of 1 game in both AC finals and 1 or two games in the GC finals.
- The GC High Handicap final was a draw after 20 games and went to a decider.
- The main changes in AC team numbers were in the Federation League (up 3) and B League (down 3).
- In its second year, the new GC Level Play league for players with handicaps 5 and above increased from 7 to 12 teams and the GC High Handicap league increased by 2 teams.
- Overall, AC and SC were unchanged, and GC was up 7.

2024 League Results

Congratulations to all of the winners:

Advanced League Division 1	Bristol A
Advanced League Division 2	East Dorset
Advanced League Division 3	Bath
Federation	Bath
Intermediate	East Dorset
B League	Worcester Norton
Short Croquet (Open)	Bath
Short Croquet (Restricted)	Bath
GC Level Play	Bristol A
GC Handicap	Cheltenham
GC High Handicap	Swanage

All of the trophies and award plaques were presented at the finals and have been left with the winners to be engraved.

Altogether, 326 block matches were scheduled, plus 15 play-offs and finals, giving a grand total of 341. Of these, 336 were actually played, 4 were conceded and 1 was cancelled. The conceded

matches were all in different blocks and no teams have been barred from entering the league in 2025.

- Bath will be invited to represent the south west in 2025 in the national AC Handicap Secretary's Shield and in the national SC Knockout.
- Cheltenham will be invited to represent us in the GC Federation Shield.

I wish them all the best of good fortune.

Promotions and relegations

Promotions and relegations in the AC Advanced League and the GC Level Play League will be:

- AC Advanced League:
 - Nailsea A relegated from Division 1 to Division 2
 - East Dorset promoted from Division 2 to Division 1
 - Bath promoted from Division 3 to Division 2

GC Level Play League:

- Camerton & Peasedown relegated from the Premier block.
- Bath and Dowlish Wake promoted from the regional blocks.
- This will increase the Premier block to 6 teams as agreed at the 2023 AGM. From now on, there will be two relegations from the Premier block each year.
- Other promotions and/or relegations will depend on the number of entries to these leagues in 2025 and may depend on the League Secretary's decision.

Finals in 2024

- I am very grateful to all of the clubs who made their facilities available for the league finals. This always involves several members at each host club giving up their time to prepare the lawns and set them out. Many also provided a referee and a report on these matches.

Leagues in 2025

The status of the B League in 2025 will have to depend on the number of entries. There were only 4 in 2024, and a league was only possible because the clubs were relatively close together. There are to be 3 additional clubs in 2025 and, hopefully, more teams.

There are no proposals for changes in the structure of the leagues, but there is one important change that we will be debating at the AGM. The proposal is to convert our two GC Handicap Leagues from Extra Strokes to Advantage GC.

Stephen Custance-Baker, retiring SWF League Secretary

Short Croquet Tournaments

Nailsea 12-14th April 2024

After the deluge of 2023 which caused the abandonment of Division 5, it was pleasant to turn up at Nailsea with the sun shining. A complement of 25 teams meant a full five divisions with 102 players (two teams played 5 players) taking part over the weekend.

Division 1.

Nailsea Trendlewood returned to winning ways after a few barren seasons. After 4 rounds, four teams could win the trophy and all 5 could be relegated depending upon the results of the final round. Ultimately, only 2 games separated first from last, who were last year's champions Nailsea and they are relegated.

Division 2.

And Nailsea are replaced in Division 1 by Nailsea Avening who pipped Bath Salts and East Dorset by one game. Camerton and Peasedown A are relegated.

Division 3.

Sidmouth Connaught are Division 3 champions and earn a Sunday date in Division 2 in 2025. Exeter, who were promoted from Division 4 last year, return after being relegated.

Division 4.

Bath Buns and Glamorgan were level going in to the last round where they had to play each other. Bath won 4-0 and are promoted. Budleigh Salterton Rushes are relegated.

Division 5.

Bristol Brunels were comfortable winners and are promoted. After a last round defeat, Camerton and Peasedown B are relegated.

Many thanks to Nailsea for their hospitality and preparation of the lawns.

Budleigh Salterton 4-6th October 2024.

This year we had 29 teams and 116 players. This is the first time since COVID that we have been able to play a sixth division but it seems that we cannot hold both Spring and Autumn tournaments without being affected by the weather. This year an absolute deluge on Sunday, resulted in the abandonment of Divisions 1 and 2 and some tricky calculations to arrive at winners and relegation.

Division 1.

The heavy rain started at the beginning of Round 3, and within 20 minutes the lawns were unplayable. After some discussion, Chris and I decided that the only way to determine a result was to calculate the percentage wins from games completed. So, Kington Langley Aardvarks came out on top and are 2024 champions, and Glamorgan are relegated.

Division 2.

A similar method was used to arrive at Bristol Boys as winners and they achieve promotion. Sidmouth Fortfield are relegated.

Division 3.

Four teams could have won going in to the last round, but Budleigh Salterton Roquets kept their nose ahead and are promoted. Taunton Tiggers are relegated.

Division 4.

After a late withdrawal, there were only four teams in this division and therefore no relegation. The winners were Camerton and Peasedown B, but, in accordance with the rules, they were denied promotion due to using a guest who made them ineligible. Therefore second-placed Budleigh Salterton Mallets are promoted.

Division 5.

Blewbury, from outside the SWF, were accepted as a guest team in this division and were the eventual winners. It has yet to be decided whether they can be promoted if they wish to enter in 2025 and if there is sufficient space for them. Bradford on Avon were runners-up and Exeter B are relegated.

Division 6.

Weston Super Mare are the winners and promoted after a last round 2-2 draw with the second team kept them one game ahead. Budleigh Salterton Rushes picked up the mythical wooden spoon. A welcome here to Tisbury who made their first foray into competitive croquet.

Many thanks to Budleigh Salterton for their hospitality and superb lawns and also to Chris Donovan for his unflappable and efficient management.

John Grimshaw.

Coaching

2024

In May/June we delivered another hybrid Club Level Course for eight people* via Zoom followed by two days of practical learning and assessment at Budleigh Salterton.

Participants worked in pairs (where possible an AC player was paired with a GC player).

Day 1 was spent in preparing for the practical coaching on day 2. This gave an opportunity for participants to plan and practice.

On day 2 of the practical course, each participant delivered two x 40 minute coaching sessions to 'volunteer students' from Budleigh Salterton. Their coaching buddy assisted whilst the other led and then switched roles. In addition, each pair was assigned a qualified assistant coach.

There was regular written feedback from the students via the 'liked' and 'learned' post its.

At the end of the day the pairs fed back to each other on the positives and 'aspects to consider for your future coaching'. This was supplemented by feedback from the lead coach and the assistant coaches.

All the participants made good progress and are at various stages of completing their portfolio of five coaching sessions back at their home clubs.

2025

Another hybrid course is planned for March/April 2025 in the North of the SWF.

* participants consisted of three from Budleigh and Charlton plus one from Sidmouth and Exeter

Referees Courses

2024

GC

Our third GC Referees course was held at Bath Croquet on February 24 and 25. This was preceded on Friday 23 February with a refresher course for existing qualified referees.

Thanks again to Ian Shore's excellent delivery of the courses and assessments.

There were seven participants for the main course with a very good pass rate.

Another refresher is planned for Saturday February 16 and an assessment day for prospective referees on Sunday February 17.

The face-to-face course has been reduced to one day with much more of the content to be delivered via Zoom and learning modules.

AC

Four people attended Dave Kibble's course. All have passed the first part of the examination and two have taken and passed the second part and have become Assistant Referees, one wants to go on to become a full Referee. The remaining two await a confidence boost to take the friendly on-lawn examination.

2025

Dave Kibble is happy to run another course in 2025. However, he reports that there is an issue of identifying and chasing down people who have done the course but not been examined.

Development

2024

Another busy year for our clubs endeavouring to improve the facilities for their members and, in one case, securing the club's future.

Summary of Croquet England Grants to our clubs

All £5,000 grants:

- Cornwall for purchase of freehold. Cornwall were also granted a £20 000 interest free loan.
- Nailsea for improvements to entrance track and car park
- Tisbury for new extension to club house

In all three cases, Croquet England's funding committee was impressed by the commitment of the club members to the projects.

In addition, the committee greatly valued the each clubs efforts to raise its own funding through local grants and crowdfunding projects.

An interesting fact, the SWF were granted 34.1% of Croquet England's financial budget for grants in 2024.

Other developments

After many challenging years, Abbey have relocated to Butleigh near Street and Brian Wilson continues to give them great support.

- Zooms
 - We have completed another full series of monthly Zooms during the 'off season'
- Lawn management
 - We were pleased to host a second Dennis Mowers Roadshow at Bristol. The advice on lawn management was excellent and we hope to host another one in the near future.

2025

Development Officers (DOs)

At present we have three DOs to cover the SWF.

These are Klim Seabright in the North, Brian Wilson in Central and East and, Paul Francis in the South and West.

In 2025 we are pleased to be adding Andru Blewett to take over development duties for Cornwall and North/West Devon. We hope to add at least one more DO to our ranks so that there is one DO per 10 clubs.

Croquet England Club of the Year Award

We would urge clubs to apply for the three awards.

The financial incentive for each award has been increased to £750 per award and the three awards have been changed (see below).

The closing date has been extended to the end of March 2025 so there is plenty of time to get applications sorted. For further information please contact Paul Francis by email at paulwfrancis@icloud.com

The three new categories are:

- New clubs formed in the last five years (we have several).
- Clubs with one to three courts.
- Clubs with four or more courts.

Zooms

The new series is under way!

Lawn Management

Currently working with lawn mower manufacturers to provide specific croquet lawn management support through face-to-face support, online and training courses.

Handicapping

Most handicapping issues occur where clubs have no Club Handicappers or where the Club Handicapper is not proactive enough. Club Handicappers should be continually reviewing all handicaps especially those where the player does not play enough games for the Automatic Handicap System to be effective.

One concern the SWF Committee had was GC players with low handicaps playing, and usually winning, a very few AC league games with a high handicap. The result of this was little movement of their AC handicap and it not reflecting their improved ability.

We contacted CqE Handicapping Chairman/Committee with the result that a discussion document was produced suggesting that there should be minimum gaps between the GC and AC handicaps. We will see how this develops.

Another communication with that committee concerned improving the "How to fill out your handicap card" on the CqE website. Then extending that to change the handicap card layout so it is clear what goes where. Still awaiting a response on that.

One final thought. We are aware of examples of club handicappers wrongly increasing handicaps. After Covid, one club increased all handicaps as their players hadn't played for a while. There was another instance where a handicap was increased because a player hadn't played for a few months.

A player returning to croquet should always play on the handicap when they left except in very exceptional circumstances.

I'm always happy to take any queries relating to handicaps.

Mike Rice

Safeguarding and Welfare

I have decided to stand down as Federation Safeguarding Officer following this AGM so this will be my final report in this role.

It has been another relatively quiet year as Federation Safeguarding Officer in respect of actual safeguarding issues. My main actions have been to respond to a number of queries relating to policy and or to direct the enquirer to where the information may be found.

The transition to Croquet England and the redefining of the role of Safeguarding Officer to that of Welfare Officer all seems to have passed without issue.

Since the last AGM the second on-line training package, covering Adults at Risk has been rolled out, adding to the first package covering Child Safeguarding. By now all Welfare Officers should have completed both.

Andru Blewett