

Chairman's Report 2011 - 2012

A few years ago (about 22 years!) I was asked to go on a course about creative writing and the modern soap opera. What this had to do with my job as an IT advisor I wasn't sure, but then as I was "salaried staff" the idea of going on a three day all expenses paid course in a nice hotel in Devon was fine by me. Dartmouth in June is lovely, and a hotel with comfy seats and a subsidised bar is always good for a sleepy afternoon seminar post 4 pints of Stella and a fresh crab sandwich. As you may imagine I wasn't destined to learn much, but I do remember the first session run by a man we called Dyk after it became obvious from his first flipchart attempt that he was "word blind". These were pre PC days remember? True to tradition we were asked to get into teams, (I quickly joined the 4 ladies from Holland here on fact find) and we then had to ponder the key features of a soap opera and add them to Dyk's flopchart. After a lengthy discussion mainly about local restaurants, our Anglo – low countries team wrote – "Never reach a satisfactory conclusion and keep them wanting more". Which, after 3 days was all I had written on my complimentary notepad.

Well, for me the Club is very much like that, we may have good seasons off the pitch and bad ones on it and vice versa, but each new season starts with optimism for something intangible that is never fulfilled. Each one of us has their own agenda, to get into a higher team, to get as fit as I was 20 years ago, to not fall over so often, to stop leaving the shower gel in the showers every week, and the Club is there to provide a framework within which we can all try to reach our goals and most importantly not quite reach them because we want to want more.

In this respect the Club appears to be very successful, we have an enviable reputation for promoting hockey through our youth development work, we are second to none in retaining players as they move slowly but surely down through the teams, and we have the best bar and clubhouse atmosphere I can currently think of. It would have been possible to say all of those things for the last few years and since the new pitch went down things have been looking good for the Club and its Members on the pitch too. And it is exactly when you can say those things that the alarm bells should start to ring.

Here are my key concerns for the seasons ahead, and I will start with the bigger picture of Sport and English Hockey. With a significant reduction in school sport due in part to our recent obsession with Literacy, Numeracy and League tables, compounded by a massive reduction in televised sports other than football, the future of amateur sport in the UK is looking grim. Add in the elitist attitudes of English Sports governing bodies who are happy to pump money in at the top end and ignore where it is needed the most, at the grass roots, plus the reduction in money that Local Authorities have available for promotion of Sport, then we are in for a torrid time ahead. I don't hold out much hope of England Hockey investing in or supporting at individual club level as they have a different agenda which is aimed at centres of excellence and National Team success, and to be perfectly honest some of their directives actively damage the sport they promote, beware their desire to raise the age of participation in adults teams. In reality therefore Clubs must find ways to promote hockey themselves, and thanks to Bob and his coaching team we have been doing that brilliantly, but it needs to continue and it needs to develop further. And here is the reason why..

In a recent meeting with other local Clubs we discussed our individual problems, and it became obvious that we appeared to be the odd ones out. One Club with recent National success were very worried about their failure to retain older players, while nearly all the others were facing reductions in membership due to having NO juniors coming through from any local schools. With the exception of one or two Private Schools there was no hockey taking place in their area at all, and with falling memberships there were fewer people with coaching Level 2 qualifications able to get out there and do something about it. So what this means is that the problems for hockey are widespread and not just about us .. if we are not careful we might still be a big club but we will be struggling to find anyone to play against.

So for me the season ahead is about finding ways to bring Clubs together to promote Hockey and gain a stronger voice. Without the Clubs there is no England Hockey, and it doesn't work the other way round does it? If you have any ideas about the future of hockey please let me know, we need to get the discussion going.

So what of the future at local level? We need to start to think about bringing younger members in to organizational roles, our stalwarts will not be there forever so apprenticeships will be available if you want to get involved. We have a number of new faces on Committee which is promising, so hopefully they will start to influence how we move forward. Umpiring is an ongoing issue and there will be opportunities to train during the season, I have a couple of vouchers for a free NHA Level 1 course if you are keen to learn some rules. Coaching is increasingly important so we will be supporting as much as we can anyone who wants to gain Level 1 or 2 qualifications.

We will of course be facing the usual problems of attracting new players to replace the younger members who are off to College and the older weekend warriors who have too many bits not working, so if you can help us promote the Club then please do so. The new pitch is nicely bedded in but we need to improve how we care for it. Currently we are very poor at disposing of our drinks bottles and of staying off the pitch and out of the dugouts when we are not playing, and getting off the pitch reasonably quickly when the game is over. Just little areas that I will be asking captains to think about. The pitch is great, be proud of it, look after it.

Training starts Thursday 4th August for ladies and Monday 1st August for Men. I look forward to seeing you at one or the other (possibly both?). Availability for the full season are on your Members page of the web site, so please let us know your availabilities as far ahead as possible. Subs can be paid online too, so get that sorted ASAP.

Let's have another great season..... I am off to buy a new pair of boots.

Geoff Bail

Chairman

July 2011
