

Southern Counties Hockey Association

Annual Report June 2011

This is my eleventh annual report to the Association.

Hockey in the Southern Counties remains strong. Whilst mergers of clubs continue we have seen no reduction in the playing strength. Traditionally hockey was a simple winter sport played in many cases as a complement to cricket. Whilst a limited amount of grass hockey continues to be played, mainly by Masters, hockey on the plastic surface is now a skilled, physically demanding sport.

Our league programmes ran pretty well taking the season as whole. The appalling weather impacted to a considerable extent but goodwill got the programmes complete on time. Oddly the bad weather had an even greater effect on the indoor programme with tournaments curtailed and venues rearranged when the booked venues became inaccessible.

Congratulations to our regional league winners Teddington (men) and Oxford Hawks (women), both promoted to the National League Conference East. Sevenoaks (men) return to South Premier 1.

It is too easy here to simply record the movement into, and out of, the National League. This is but the top of our very broad based pyramid. There is an enormous effort put into organising all our leagues and their divisions which provide competitive hockey for a very wide range of skills and abilities.

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves of the extent of South Hockey. The Men's South League encompasses clubs from nine hockey counties, and a little bit more. It operates as a single open league structure with 24 teams in its two premier divisions plus a further 72 in the regional divisions. Below this are a further 44 divisions providing hockey for nearly 500 teams. To this we must add the London League, the Surrey Grass Conference and other various local initiatives providing hockey for the more mature, Masters, players.

There is an equal depth of hockey on the women's side covering seven hockey counties. The South Women's League has two premier divisions of 10 sides each plus two regional divisions of 12 teams each. Below this the game is organised as four county leagues and a Berks, Bucks and Oxon League, in total nearly 400 teams.

There is also a wealth of league activity for junior players. All this requires a considerable application and talent for organisation. Almost all of it is done on a voluntary basis with only basic expenses offered and frequently not claimed.

At this point it is important to record our thanks to all the volunteers who are involved with operating the leagues and competition activity for us.

"Jolly hockey sticks" are a thing of the past. There is an increasing professionalism at all levels and in all aspects of playing, coaching, umpiring and managing; evident even in the smaller clubs. All clubs now see the virtue of squads rather than teams and careful squad management with rolling subs is the norm in all competition hockey.

This increasing professionalism comes at a price. Regrettably sportsmanship is often lacking and in some cases attitudes more reminiscent of "the beautiful game" are appearing. Mercifully, given the volume of hockey, the number of red cards – suspension from playing hockey – remains small. This year has also seen a reduction in the number of match day

Southern Counties Hockey Association

Annual Report June 2011

misconduct offences. We have a robust discipline policy within the National Code and are grateful to all who assist in its implementation.

Hockey is a family sport and the majority of our clubs, big and small, run successful junior programmes. Indeed it is most encouraging for the sport that there is such enthusiasm amongst the youngsters. We look forward to Great Britain really shining in next year's Olympics as it will be a further boost to our sport.

It is amongst the young participants that we must ensure we instil the principles of sportsmanship. When introducing our youngsters into the senior game clubs should remind the older players that they have a responsibility to set the example. Whilst it is fair game for the old hands to show the youngsters the "tricks of the trade" it should be done on the basis that you do not complain when you get caught out.

Finding volunteers at all levels of hockey continues to be a problem. Even in the most flourishing clubs much of the administration is frequently left in the hands of a few dedicated souls. Most of our volunteers have been active over a not inconsiderable number of years. They are invaluable but will not wish to go on indefinitely; succession planning is something we must take very seriously. At county and regional level across the country the problem has become acute. We as an Association are not immune. We have tired for three years now to find my successor even offering a small payment as an inducement. We can expect other vacancies over the next couple of years!

During the year Council met on three occasions and Management five times. Officers and members of Management also attended numerous EH meetings many connected with the Single System. The work of Council and Management is not perhaps that visible to the average club member. However the Association runs on a very frugal basis to deliver that essential background work to make hockey in the Southern Counties the undoubted success it is.

Our new single Junior Committee lead by Richard Macer and Sandra Marlow has worked well. It has certainly reduced the meeting time pressures. The Committee has a number of important issues to deal with. It will be giving careful consideration to the breadth of the JAC county championships programme. Finding suitable double pitch venues is not easy particularly as there is a need to avoid too much travel. Finding empathetic umpires to match players' skills and abilities for these matches continues to be an issue.

Our JAC county championships provide an initial competitive challenge for the youngsters. It is pleasing to record that Kent has requested to join the girls' programme coming into line with the boys' programme. Once again this is an intensive programme. The EH Priority and Centralised Calendar sets the dates.

The division of the junior national competitions into separate schools and clubs has not made life any easier. Schools require midweek commitment from organisers and umpires. The skills, particularly in the older age groups, deserve effective umpires – not easy to find during a working day. It is a pity that those who turn out are not better appreciated by some of the school coaches and managers who are themselves pretty hopeless as umpires.

Our Masters hockey goes from strength to strength with trials needed to select players for our representative sides. In the recent Divisional tournaments our Over 60 and 65 squads created something of a record for English Masters Hockey when both sides went through the entire tournament, not only winning all their games against the other four regions at both age

Southern Counties Hockey Association

Annual Report June 2011

groups, but also not conceding a single goal. This is unprecedented at either age group, let alone both in the same year.

At the younger age groups our performance was not up to last year. In a six team tournament including Wales and Combined Services the O40 came second, the O45 were fifth in a seven team tournament (all regions plus Scotland and Wales); the O50 were second in a six team tournament and the O55 were fourth in a six team tournament. Our Lady Masters will be putting out sides at Over 40 and Over 45.

Our other major commitment is as an agent for EH managing our share of the Single System programme. Its object is the identification, retention and development of potential elite players. Tony Eade with his Development Committee is a powerhouse of not uncritical enthusiasm for the system. The whole basis of the effort is to ensure that the young people get the best experience and only have to travel the minimum distance to obtain it.

The JRPCs and Tier 1 activity are two areas where it has become necessary to pay the administrators, managers and coaches involved in the running of the project. We have been fortunate to have recruited three excellent team leaders for the regional centres at Tonbridge, Eastleigh and Oxford. We also have to liaise in detail with the East managed centre at Northwood. There are hopeful signs that new IT developments at EH may reduce the administrative effort needed to run the system.

I return each year to the subject of umpiring. We have a very strong base in the SCHUA which provides umpires for our top four divisions. It continues to have success in developing its members into national league umpires and so needs to recruit from the counties. The county associations have many calls on their active umpires and now appoint on the basis of top down, made easier as a result of the open league structures. They do however run out quite quickly so the greater part of our hockey is umpired by club umpires.

It is a pity that so many clubs who aspire to, and achieve, higher level playing status do little or nothing to encourage their own club members to improve their umpiring skills and take neutral appointments through HUAs. To be fair this is not just a problem locally it is a national problem. This is a quite selfish approach and a more robust national policy needs to be thought through to make the elite clubs stand their corner in providing umpire resources.

It goes without saying that the league and competition organisers are fully appreciative of the work of all our HUAs in the efforts they make to get appropriately qualified and experienced umpires on the right games. On behalf of the Association a big thank you to all the umpires who turn out regularly and without whom the players would have a much poorer playing experience.

As we came to the end of the season under report EH announced that it was doing away with its regional development managers. They are being replaced by relationship managers whose prime function will be selling EH products and services. The Association deprecates this development as over the years we have found the relationship with our RDMs and their direct assistance to the Association to be of value. How the new system will work remains to be seen but it does appear to leave a large gap between the national body and its principle constituents.

Southern Counties Hockey Association

Annual Report June 2011

The main body representing regional association interests is the Regions' Consultative Committee. This is a Committee enshrined in the EH Articles with special reserve powers. It should to my mind be a sounding board for EH before initiating new developments. However the EH seems to be intent to find other communication routes.

As I said at the beginning this is my eleventh report to the Association and it will definitely be my last annual report to the Association as its Hon Secretary.

I have had the great pleasure of working with an excellent team of officers. My two Chairmen, first Sheila Plant, and now Mike Ward, have been tireless in trying to do their best for Southern Counties Hockey. Between them they have a century of hockey experience so their comments and values deserve proper consideration. Our Treasurer, Mike Taylor, too is well experienced in the ways of hockey and with him I share the frustration of the way the single system was implemented without proper consideration to the financial implications particularly for regional associations.

Maybe, just maybe, we are now too long in the tooth and new minds and fresh ideas are required. Hockey continues to develop apace. New people – you must be out there - will surely be necessary to meet the opportunities and challenges, from whatever emerges as a result of GB's Olympic performance in 2012.

I thank everyone who has done so much to make Southern Counties hockey the undoubted success it is and wish it continuing success for the future.

Neville Wrench
Hon Secretary

Southern Counties Hockey Association

Annual Report June 2011

Southern Counties Honours 2010-11

South Men's League	Teddington	Promoted to EHL
South Women's League	Oxford Hawkes	Promoted to EHL

EH Competitions

Women's Cup	Surbiton	Losing finalist
Men's Trophy	West Hampstead	Winner
Men's Trophy	Tulse Hill and Dulwich	Losing finalist
Women's Trophy	Wimbledon	Winner
Women's Trophy	Tulse Hill and Dulwich	Losing finalist
Men's Vase	Burnt Ash	Winner
Women's 2 nd XI Cup	Surbiton 2	Losing finalist
Women's 2 nd XI Trophy	Havant 2	Winner

Men's Master's Cup Over 50	Indian Gymkhana Supervets	Winner
Men's Master's Cup Over 50	Richmond Vintage	Losing finalist
Women Master's Cup Over 40	Wimbledon	Winner
Women Master's Plate Over 35	Woking	Losing finalist

Boys' U16 Cup	Canterbury	Losing finalist
Girls' U16 Cup	Teddington	Losing finalist
Boys' U16 Plate	Bromley and Beckenham	Winner
Boys' U16 Plate	Trinity-Midwhitgiftian	Losing finalist
Girls' U16 Plate	Oxford Hawks	Losing finalist
Boy's U18 Cup	Canterbury	Losing finalist
Girl's U18 Cup	Surbiton	Winner
Boy's U18 Plate	Woking	Winner
Girl's U18 Plate	Horsham	Winner

U18 Girls Schools	Kingston Grammar	Winner
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Indoor

Men	East Grinstead	Winner
Women	Reading	Losing Finalist
U16 Boy's Schools	Whitgift	Winner
U18 Boy's Schools	Whitgift	Winner
U18 Boy's Clubs	Wycombe	Winner
U16 Boy's Clubs	Canterbury	Winner
U16 Girls' Clubs	Wycombe	Winner