

2017 MASTER HOME INTERNATIONAL SCOTLAND

Event Dates:	Friday 29 th - Saturday 30 th Apr 2016		
Address:	Aberdeen Squash and Racketball Club, Aberdeen.		
England Teams:	Men's O35	Men's O55	Women's O55
	Darren Lewis (Captain) Jason Barry Mick Biggs James Bowden Alex Preston Keith Timms	Neil Harrison (Captain) Ian Bradburn Tom Burton Ged Martin John Parkes Mark Woodliffe	Karen Hume (Captain) Jill Champion Sarah Howlett Susan Pynegar Lesley Sturgess
	Men's O75		
	Adrian Wright (Captain) John Blurton Geoff Coe John Shaw		



MENS OVER 35 RESULTS SUMMARY

Team					Total	Position
		20	20	20	60	1
	4		20	17	41	1
	3	5		16	32	3
	2	10	8		20	4

MENS OVER 35 REPORT

To follow

MENS OVER 55 RESULTS SUMMARY

Team					Total	Position
		20	20	20	60	1
	1		4	15	20	3
	2	20		20	42	2
	0	9	0		9	4

MENS OVER 55 REPORT

“The cream of England’s O55s converged on Aberdeen to contest the Edinburgh Quaich Trophy. This is a trophy that was first played for in 1986 and has been won by England every year since then, other than 2001, when the event didn’t take place. I’m intrigued to know who actually played for England in 1986 as by my reckoning the current crop of O80 year olds; Messrs Kirton, Woodliffe & Kirton would actually have been too young at that time! Answers on a postcard please. Also, why wasn’t it played for in 2001? Possibly to give the other Home Nations some respite from losing to England? If so, it hasn’t done them much good since!

This report could have been summarised in a couple of words – “we won”. Or, to pad things out, “we won 5-0, 5-0, 5-0”. Or to really go into detail, “we won 45 games against 3 conceded”. The culprits who conceded those games were spoken to in the harshest terms! Totally unacceptable from the skipper’s perspective! Looking back at every other England team’s results in this Home International series, I see that only the O70s had a better weekend, not that I’m being competitive, I’m sure their games were easier!

To backtrack slightly, I have to say that the pride in being asked to skipper England O55s at the British Closed in February was immense. Squad selected and notified, all I had to do was sit back and enjoy the next 3 months until the actual weekend. And then an email dropped into my Inbox that is probably every skipper’s nightmare. It was merely entitled “Ankle” and sent by Mark Woodliffe, probably the second best O55 in the World behind Willie Hosie. My mind went into overdrive trying to imagine just how serious this might be. Tentatively, I opened the mail to discover Mark had “rolled his ankle”! How serious could a rolled ankle be? For goodness sake, up here in the North East of England we routinely play with severed or broken limbs held together by chewing gum and bluetac! A rolled ankle? Okay, I was a little hysterical, but who wouldn’t be?

So, with much trepidation I held my breath for 4 weeks. I met the great man at Aberdeen airport, looking for evidence of discomfort or limping. Mark, by the way, had travelled from his home in Zurich, via Amsterdam, to be a part of the weekend, now that’s commitment. The best of best news was conveyed. With very tight strapping that turned the rest of his leg blue he was up for the scrap, and would play all 3 matches. A complete out-pouring of relief from the skipper!

Accommodation was provided at “The Spires”. Only 50m from Aberdeen Squash Club. That, unfortunately, is where (for me) any positivity ends! Myself, John Parkes and Ged Martin billeted in Room 48 of Cell Block G, Mark, Ian Bradburn and Tom Burton billeted in Room 17 of Cell Block C. Conveniently miles apart! I bagged the double room only to find an East to West sloping mattress that was treacherous! John and Ged in the twin, with no room to swing a cat! Sorry, but give me a Hotel any time, self catering on an International weekend - no thanks!

We dutifully changed into England kit for the team photos. Great to get a collective Team England photo taken, I’ve never seen so many Lions in my life, like something out of a David Attenborough wildlife programme! Only Bradders bucked protocol by opting for a pair of shorts he’d found in lost property. As for the new kit, I suppose opinions are divided. For me, I like understated. Lucky we can play a bit!

And so to the squash. I won’t provide a blow by blow account, but more of an overview of how each team member played. I’d already conveyed the news to the team that, inexplicably, we were required to play “normal” scoring to 9/10! What? Why? Abnormal scoring more like it! The World has gone PAR, move on (rant over)!

Mark Woodliffe at 1 (Gloucestershire/Zurich). Just a different class. Effortless movement coupled with playing the right shot at the right time, qualities I must work on at some stage! A minor blip on Saturday morning versus Ireland dropping a game when possibly a little woozy from the night before (more on this later), but anyone who witnessed his dismantling of Scottish legend Alan Tommo Thomson for the loss of only 6 points would say they witnessed a master-class. 3 matches, 3 wins.

At 2, John Parkes (Worcestershire), just a great athlete on court with a great engine. Hunts the ball and such is his desire to retrieve just about every ball, is still inclined on occasions to dive – crazy stuff! The broadest of Brummie accents, which made me chuckle when playing Scotland against an opponent with the broadest Glaswegian (I think) accent! A confusing referee’s decision (not the first), saw both players arguing their case with passion. The watching spectators looked at each other and shrugged. Subtitles required! 3 matches, 3 wins.

At 3, Ged Martin (Yorkshire), the ex-pro is just like Woody in so much that he moves effortlessly and plays the right shot at the right time. Excellent technique and with just the most exquisite backhand drop from mid-court. Never ever flustered and displayed great composure against Scotland off the back of an atrocious decision at 9-9 in the second to bounce back to win 0 and 1 in the 3rd and 4th games. Pre-weekend I had Ged down as possibly the quietest member of the squad, he’s certainly the silent assassin on the court! Quiet? Just the loudest snorer ever! The noise was of epic proportions. 3 matches, 3 wins.

At 4, me (Durham & Cleveland), with trademark wonky backhand and an array of shots straight out of a Bring & Buy Sale. Cleverly disguised mis-hits and general string avoidance. It’s quite simple, if I haven’t a clue where the ball’s going, what chance my opponent?! 6 months into the curse that is plantar faciitis, just the worst injury ever! Darren Lewis (England O35s) has it and he’s a proper athlete, so I suppose I’m in good company! 2 matches, 2 wins.

At 5, Ian Bradburn (Lancashire), probably playing his best squash in years. His last O55 Home Internationals before going off to play with other old people in the O60s! Bradders has one simple yet effective tactic – hit the ball hard. If that fails, hit it harder! His serves should come with a health warning as his opponents are always in danger! Absolutely fitting that on match ball in his final ever O55s match he hit a back wall nick straight from the serve. Myself and Ian go back over 30 odd

years in inter-county rivalry, and probably 17 or so in the same England teams; a total gentleman on and off the court. 2 matches, 2 wins.

And finally, at 6, Tom Burton (Worcestershire), the personification of tenacity. One of the most reliable of players, just like his county team mate, Parkesy, he just refuses to let the ball die. Up until 2 seasons ago Tom was one of the most mild mannered players on the circuit. Then he started directly injecting bull's testosterone, eating raw meat and using certain language on the court I usually only hear from Mrs Harrison when I drop sweaty squash kit around the house! Tom became Tommy! My job over the weekend was to calm Tommy down, no mean feat! He accidentally wore the new England shorts back to front; 3 Lions on his shirt and 3 lions on his bum! The mistake noticed and rectified. No-one laughed, no-one dared. Fist pumping stuff from the off, even at the racquet spin! 2 matches, 2 wins.

So that was that, job done. Aberdeen squash club was good, albeit a little on the tropical side heat wise. The Friday night saw us re-hydrate a little too energetically and concluded the evening with a round of Southern Comforts, courtesy of Bradders. The toast – to our friend Glen Ragou, greatly missed. Glen would have grinned his broadest grin though on Saturday morning as to a man we were all under the weather!

The Presentation Dinner was excellent. The squad, suited and booted, and sporting that trendy ESM tie, were the smartest team present (I'm biased). We shared a long table with the England O55 Ladies. Being winners, we did put a slight gap between the two teams as there was a large black cloud above their table following their defeat to Scotland! They seemed to take that defeat and subsequent banter well!! Any suggestion that Captain Hume should collect all her team's England kit for incineration, and that Coach Smith should fall on his broken racquet, seems a little harsh!

Just a great privilege to play for England again. An honour to skipper such a great set of lads. The Edinburgh Quaich retained. Something to tell the grandchildren about. Woody got on the 6am (ouch) flight to Amsterdam, then onwards to Zurich. Bradders actually got on his scheduled flight (I think) unlike Dublin 2 years ago! The rest of us departed Scotland during the rest of the day. Just brilliant."

Neil Harrison
Captain

MENS OVER 75 RESULTS SUMMARY

Team					Total	Position
		14	14	12	40	1
	0		3	4	7	4
	3	14		14	31	2
	4	12	0		16	3

MENS OVER 75 REPORT

A round trip of 920 miles completed for the second consecutive year for the Home Internationals in Aberdeen (O70's last year) following a successful regain of the MO75 Trophy from Wales. Not for the first time a trophy has been recovered, but not in the state received from our Welsh friends. The cup is supposed to be round not Oval. Handle broken as well. For the record.

The England squad was depleted when John Shaw called in with a pulled Hamstring. Wales, capable of fielding a strong side if they could get them all to travel, also lost their journeyman Brian Phillips.

In our first match on Friday against the Welshmen, debutant John Blurton recovered from early nerves, suffering only a severe setback 9-0 in the third, before taking out John Whalley 3-1. The captain secured the match with victory over Garry Williams. Surprisingly Geoff Coe, a serious mountain bike man, so fitness not a problem, was humbled by a remarkable performance from Harry Barnard. Scotland meanwhile showed that they might be the team to beat routing Ireland 3-0.

On Saturday morning, we romped home against Ireland 3-0 to set up a fight out with Scotland in the afternoon after they beat Wales 3-0.

I was a little nervous about our debutant who seemed a little out of his depth to start with against Andrew Rugg-Gunn who was striking the ball well, but he recovered to take the first. I began to get a little nervous after he lost the second, but he showed true spirit to justify his selection by fighting back hard in the 4th and then taking the fourth more comfortably. Well done John Blurton – unbeaten in your first Home international. With the captain expected to win, over his 82-year-old opponent Tom Kane, who had played at 3 for the O70's side in Wales, in April – and who had captured the chairman's notice declaring that he would walk the Open if he entered – I should have known it was not going to be easy. Going back to HIHO which means more work effort is required, after having a useful first game lead that slipped into a 10-8 defeat I suspected I was in for a fight from the very fit 82-year-old. The IP Punk ale on Friday night had obviously made its mark. I was relieved when the marker awarded me the 3rd game 9-6 following a let appeal which he disallowed. I was off court quick before he could change his mind. The 4th went easily my way without much opposition. It was only when I saw Tom limping afterwards that he explained that he had broken one of his toes – I think it might have been in the collision causing the let appeal in the previous

game. The title was therefore sealed in our favour. But Geoff Coe had much to prove. Playing Vincent Taylor who had previously murdered Harry Barnard, who in turn had embarrassed Geoff, it wasn't looking good. I missed the conclusion as I went to shower with score 1 all. When I returned, it was all over and Geoff had recovered his mojo. Congratulations to the team I had thought it might be tricky – in the end worthy winners.


Thanks to Scotland Squash, Blair McKenzie and all the Aberdeen Squash Club Staff, Markers, George Tierney the weekend organiser and Mike Halpin who did a superb job taking photographs for which we are grateful. The Spires accommodation as usual was first class and the Saturday dinner undertaken by outside caterers was excellent. The only downside – partial inebriation and memory loss lead to me leaving my winners medal on the dining table. I am hoping someone might come forward and ease my guilt and loss by saying they have it.

**Adrian Wright
Captain**

PS: for the record Our debutant John Blurton was delighted to take charge of the trophy to show off to his club, have it engraved and possibly repaired. (John keep the receipt so that any monies can be reclaimed from ES).



WOMENS OVER 55 RESULTS SUMMARY

Team					Total	Position
		17	6	14	37	2
	0		0	0	0	4
	16	17		17	50	1
	3	17	1		21	3

WOMENS OVER 55 REPORT

It was a grey day when the team arrived in Scotland's 'Granite City'. Suitably impressed by the accommodation and its proximity to the match venue, the team were looking forward to a challenging weekend of squash.



Their first opponent was the Welsh Team- a team of Davies plus one-, with number one and two strings being very familiar opponents. First onto the stage was Lesley Sturgess, whose court craft and shot play proved too much for Annette Davies. Next on was captain Karen Hume, who never having lost a match for England before, was determined not to lose her record. Unfortunately for her, Sian Johnson was also on a mission not to lose, and played the match of her life- every shot hit with skill, precision and pace. The match now stood in the balance at one rubber each. Sue Pynegar then went on to face Davies number 2- Kerry Davies-, a match in which Sue's tricky shots around the front of the court picked up the all-important points. Finally, it was Jill Campion's turn who, facing an extremely familiar Davies (Lynne), was able to exert her authority and win comfortably for the loss of 4 points.

Saturday morning and the team faced their enthusiastic Irish opponents. With Karen standing down it was the time for Sarah Howlett to make her 2017 HI debut- and this she did according to plan, winning 3 /0. The rest of the team also put in fine performances, winning by the same margin. The match was played in great spirit and sportsmanship.

Finally, the time came for the match which we all knew would decide the trophy winners. The atmosphere was electric and the home crowd quite vociferous. First on was Lesley to play a fearsome competitor, Eunice Bond. Following a shaky start, Lesley managed to level the match at 1/1...then 2/1...2/2. The final game was tense, with Lesley emerging the victor 9/4. Whew. With nerves in shreds, Karen went on to face the newcomer to the Scottish team in this age group- youngster Fiona McClean, whose recent performances suggested that she was in fine form. She duly demolished Karen 9/1 in the first game only to lose the second by the same score. Could an upset be on the cards? The whisper went round the balcony. Unfortunately, the answer was "No", and despite a spirited performance, Karen went down 3/1 to her speedy opponent. The match was level at one all. Next on was Sarah who knew that her only course of action was to be victorious. Sadly, nerves overcame her until, 2/8 and 2 love down she staged a comeback and took the third game. However, she was unable to capitalise on that game and despite loud encouragement from the balcony, went down 3/1 to Moira Atkinson. Our only hope of securing victory now lay in the capable hands of Jill, whose previous battles with Scottish number 2 Pauline Douglas, are legendary. Jill took the first game, Pauline equalised with the second. The balcony became extremely noisy with shouts of encouragement, cheering and electric silences during rallies. Pauline took the third 9/7 after many long exciting rallies. At 8/8 in the fourth Pauline bravely called one- the atmosphere could have been cut with a knife until it resounded with Scottish cheers of victory.

Our thanks must be conveyed to all teams for making the weekend an extremely enjoyable, competitive event. Further thanks must go to Scottish squash for an extremely well run event and providing a high level of refereeing. Final thanks go to the venue where the standard of catering was superb- in all my years of attending Home Internationals I can honestly say that I have never been so well fed!

Karen Hume
Captain