

## The John Reay Trophy 2017

Thursday August 3rd and 16 Stags would be rolling up to compete in the prestigious John Reay Trophy. Now, I'm aware that in the UK there must be very few seniors amateur golfers (or indeed fans of the seniors club game), who are unaware of this event. So, I know that the question on everyone's lips will be "16 Stags.....how come 16?"

The rules of the JRT quite clearly stipulate that each competing club sends a team consisting of eight players only. Could our stalwart captain Mike Gilbey have made some almighty lash-up? Or joy of joys, had he arranged a caddie for each of the eight chosen players?

Of course it was neither of these. The answer, dear readers, lay in the venue. The JRT In 2017 would play out at Atherstone Golf Club. As we all know, Atherstone is one of the toughest (and hilliest) courses for club golfers in the region. This appropriately befits a club whose proud boast is that it is the only club in history to produce three Ryder cup players, although that's only three more than Stoneleigh (three isn't a big number, is it?).

That being so, at least one of the usual entrants conceded that their old dodderers, sorry, their current crop of seniors, would not be up to doing their club justice at such a testing course. This quite categorically did not mean that they were, as one Stag was heard to say "a bunch of wimps". I, together with all the other Stags, or at least most of them, or some of them surely, would like to distance myself from that view.

So, in the event, Stoneleigh Stags were to enter a second team. How so, you may ask? Well, if you cast your mind back one year you'll remember that Stoneleigh Stags won the JRT in 2016. What?.....no.....really..... you must recall this event. It was a main feature in the sporting press and I'm almost certain it may even have made the national news on TV. It certainly propelled one man from zero to big hero in the blink of an eye - didn't it Bernie? Anyway, as holders, Stoneleigh would provide a second team as a replacement.

In the spirit of camaraderie and no little humility, it was decided that this team would NOT be called the Stoneleigh Seconds. We Staggy chaps are rightly proud of our fair and, yes I'm not ashamed to say, sensitive approach to others. It would have been totally wrong to make the members of this team feel like second class citizens. We called them the "B team".

The Stags team comprised, Mike Gilbey(capt.): Martin Darbey: Robin Whitehouse: Geoff Mexson(sub for the injured Bernie Ray): J.D.Woodward: Ted Jasinski and Charles McTear. The "B team" was made up by Mick Lloyd(capt.): Peter Timothy: Peter Jamieson: Peter Cleary: Jim Jobson: Paul Steward: Mike Lovie and Rod Smith:

And so, it was into the Atherstone clubhouse at 08.15 (well before the shotgun start at 09.30 for the info' of certain Stags who would like to make sarky comments - I know who you are!!!) that your intrepid reporter strolled. Some of his hungry team-mates had already arrived and were tucking into the complimentary bacon rolls and tea/coffee so generously provided by Atherstone. The place was abuzz. Chatting with some old friends from the other clubs the consensus opinion, a tad defeatist, seemed to be that home advantage was so great on this course that the home team were strong favourites to take the trophy from the Stags.

You would think, wouldn't you, that this would be just the thing to fire up the Stags team and the other lot, the B team. You will, I hope, have noticed that although I have used the designation "the B team" I have deliberately avoided using the term "the A team" for reasons that are blindingly obvious. You're joking.....they ARE blindingly obvious. For heaven's sake...who would be Mr T (and that is in no way racist) and who would be Murdock, the one who was certified insane (and that is no way loonyist, since there are bucketloads of Stags who fit that bill, lacking only the certification).

Anyway, you've made me lose my thread now. Ah yes, the attitude and composure of the Staggy teams. Well, in the main, the aims of the Stags team appeared to be not to finish last and not be beaten by the B team. Lofty aims indeed for the holders of the Trophy. The B team's aim, understandably I think, was simply to beat the Stags team. It doesn't take an analytical genius therefore to deduce that the Stags team did not see themselves running out as winners and lifting the trophy again at Atherstone.

I tried my best, calling on everything I had learned as a past Stags captain, to change this mindset. I had a real go at raising their spirits and their ambition with inspirational encouragements such as "come on, you never know your luck" and "the weather's going to be atrocious so maybe that'll help." Alas, even these rousing exhortations didn't seem to have any effect. It would all be in the lap of the gods.

Before we get down to the meat of the day, let me give a brief outline of the format of the Competition.

*Each club team consists of eight players. Played off the white tees on a full handicap, individual Stableford basis, the eight scores are totalled and the worst individual score is deducted. The remaining total is the team score. Obviously, the team with the highest score wins. Because of the numbers involved, groups made up of players from different clubs go off on a shotgun start.*

And so to the competition. Just as an aside, let me say that I am a fan of the shotgun start. It has many things going for it which you'll be pleased to know I won't enumerate here. Where it hits something of a brick wall, for me at least, is when the course is exceptionally hilly. Oh....and when the participants are left to find their own way to outlying holes on a strange course using only a tiny course map on the back of a scorecard. And so it was, that your intrepid reporter eventually blundered his weary way to the seventh tee. Fortunately there was a bit of time before the shotgun start hooter to let me overcome my exhaustion. Equally fortunately, a member of the group had a watch to ensure we teed off on time when the aforementioned hooter failed to put in an appearance. Clearly the organisers didn't give a hoot (I just couldn't resist that!).

I mentioned earlier that the weather forecast was not good and so it proved - in spades. I'd say that for the first couple of holes the weather reached the dizzy heights of "poor". Then it rained and when I say rained I mean we could have sold this stuff to a nuclear (or, as a certain US president was fond of saying "nucular") reactor. It also came close to wrecking a favourite childhood memory. Those among you who, like me, fondly remember reading Winnie the Pooh, no doubt recall, "When life gives you a rainy day, play in the puddles!". Well, clearly none of that anthropomorphic bunch, Pooh, Piglet, Tigger etc suffered the agony of being on a green, knee deep in standing water and trying to sink an eighteen foot putt!! Although it did confirm my view of how rubbish that twit of an American poet, Longfellow, was - "into each life a little rain must fall".....what a halfwitted remark .....tell that to Noah!!!! Fortunately the really torrential stuff only lasted two or three holes or I think the whole shooting match might have been called off.

Yes.....yes...okay.... I hear you - "what about the golf? Get on with telling us about the golf!" Fine, but it'll be short and sweet. Well, not too short - I can't help it, put a (figurative) pen in my hand and I have to run off at the ballpoint. As far as your intrepid reporter is concerned it was a sad and miserable experience. Although I enjoy every round of golf I play, I do admit that at times this must indicate some kind of latent masochistic streak. The JRT at Atherstone was certainly one of those occasions. A fiendishly testing course combined with awful conditions played absolute havoc with my game. I was a tad uplifted (and a bit ashamed of that) by the fact that my playing partners were also suffering badly. I walked off the course, tired, wet, and a bit downhearted, convinced that I would be the discarded eighth man. However, when I got to the Stags table and announced my feeble score I was greeted with pleased smiles and congratulations.....oh dear. This didn't bode well and yet looking around at the other

tables I could see a considerable number of miserable-looking golfers. So, it seemed that we weren't the only ones who had suffered at the hands of the course and the adverse conditions. Maybe things were looking up (in a despondent sort of way)!

If the Stags team results were uninspiring, we could only assume that the B team results must have plumbed stygian depths since they refused to share with us any of their scores. Their demeanour, however, clearly indicated that this was not because they wanted to keep a lid on a very fine result. Having said that, most of the golfers in the clubhouse, apart from the Atherstone team, looked like.....well.... .have any of you read any of the works of that oaf Tolstoy? If you have you would no doubt have recognised in most of the golfers present, the look of abysmal sadness typical of one of his Russian peasants. You know, the despairing look of a man who, having put in a heavy day's work strangling his father, beating his wife, and dropping the baby into the town reservoir, raids the drinks cabinet, only to find the vodka bottle empty. This was not a room filled with joyful hilarity and sparkling bonhomie.

Now what, you might ask, could raise the spirits of such a bunch of old losers? Why, food and drink of course. And so it was, with the bar open and the promise of grub to come, that the general mood in the clubhouse lifted and the cloud of despondency dissipated. I take issue with those Temperance Johnnies who tell you not to drink because whatever the problem, alcohol is not the solution. I think that in certain situations, although alcohol may not provide a solution, it does cheer everyone up a bit - I've even consulted a man who's been on a Clapham omnibus and he was in agreement with me. It certainly lightened the atmosphere considerably on this occasion. In pretty short order you would have been forgiven for thinking that every golfer present had walked in from a sun-drenched course having completed a sub par round. Ah, the evils of drink!

So much for the booze, what about the nosh? Well, with so many to feed, dishing it out took a bit of time (which was well spent getting even cheerier). But let me assure all you gourmets out there and, of course, the countless aficionados of the endless stream of cookery/foody programmes on tv these days, that the wait was definitely worthwhile. The main course was roast beef with Yorkshire pudding and veg and let me tell you that the beef was outstandingly toothsome (I've used this word before, so don't pretend it's unusual). This was followed by a delicious cheesecake for dessert. Everyone was replete and extremely relaxed.

So, what about the results? Strangely but pleasantly, we had all been so liquidly refreshed by then that even these could not take the edge off the general good humour which swelled the clubhouse. In a "stone-cold sober" situation, I have no doubt that several of the chaps present would have been looking round for buses, under which to throw themselves. Or tall buildings off of which to throw themselves, which could have created a sort of lemming hysteria which would have wiped out the cream of Warwickshire's seniors golfers. Thank goodness for Mr. Booze, eh?

The overall difficulty on the day can be gauged by the fact that the best Stableford score was 36 points. Our very own Keith Borer came close to that with the best Stags score of 33 points. And so to the Trophy results. In third place was Henley with a total of 190 points. In second place was,....wait for it....wait for it.....Stoneleigh Stags with 192 points. In first place, as expected, was Atherstone with 211 points.

So, make no mistake, this was a terrific (and dare I say, unexpected) result for the Stags team. And to the relief of many we did not in the least disgrace ourselves. Can the same be said for the poor old "B team"? My lips are sealed - you'll have to consult them to find that out (*shhhh.....they were the strongest team on the day*).

I'm sure I speak for all the entrants in thanking Atherstone for hosting a fine JRT event. Despite the weather the course was in great shape so thanks to the ground staff and thanks also to the staff in the clubhouse who did an excellent job looking after so many golfers.

If you would like more details of which teams played, what all of the results were etc, you might try consulting the Atherstone website, contacting the club or even something else. I wish you better luck in that endeavour than I've had.

Your intrepid reporter

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