

The John Reay Trophy

Thursday 28th July 2016 - the great day dawned.

What great day was this? I hear you ask.

Well, since you ask, the day on which the John Reay Trophy was to be played.

And what is the John Reay Trophy? you demand, your curiosity being piqued.

It's only the premier seniors amateur club competition of the year, that's what. Everyone who is anyone in golf knows that in club golf it's undoubtedly equal in standing to the British Seniors Open in the professional game.

So where wasEnough!.....Enough with the questions for goodness sake, I'm getting a headache with all the questions, it's too much like a wifely grilling. Does this sound familiar to any other chaps out there? A fellow goes out alone, unaccompanied, sans wife, to perform some simple, menial task. It might be to purchase an onion or even, on a rare occasion, an infinitely more complex operation, say for example to effect a multiple purchase like a tub of crème fraiche (the small tub and definitely not the low fat one) and a thimble. On returning, a question and answer session ensues which I'm sure rivals the Spanish Inquisition at its peak. "Was the town busy? did you see anyone you knew? which shop did you go to? was the shop busy? did you use the till or the self-service? did you find everything OK?"and on and on it endlessly goes. And all of it related to things to which any self-respecting chap on a single-minded mission pays no heed whatsoever.

Gosh, sorry, I don't know what came over me. Was that a bit of a Freudian slip there?.....I've lost the thread of what I was doing now.....oh yes, the John Reay Trophy - back to the plot.

This year Stoneleigh Deer Park was hosting this prestigious seniors competition which, even allowing for the short memory span of the aged, you should remember is called the John Reay Trophy. What a great occasion. Stoneleigh's 25th anniversary and hosting a blue riband event in the same year.

Needless to say, the man himself (John Reay) was ecstatic. Indeed, he was heard to remark that he was getting fed up with people, unaware of both events, approaching him and asking why he appeared, unusually, to be happy and smiley,oops, sorrywhy he appeared to be so much more happy and smiley than usual.

Now, there are twelve clubs involved in the competition and each enters a team of eight players. Played off the white tees on a full handicap individual Stableford basis, the best seven returns from each team are totalled and that total is the team score. The worst individual score, although discarded, would come into play in the event of tie (remember that, it is important). Because of the numbers involved, 96 players no less, groups of four, made up of players from different clubs, go off on a shotgun start.

Hopefully the last paragraph makes clear the format of the competition. If anyone is still unsure or wishes more details, feel free to contact any member of the Stags committee. They have assured me that each and every one of them will be only too happy to spend as long as you like going over the details.

Purely as a matter of interest, the last time this jamboree was held at Stoneleigh, several years ago, also happens to be the only time the Stoneleigh Stags have won the trophy. I should just give a "big shout out" (apparently this phrase is what passes for "mention" amongst the hipster "yoof" of today) to Brian Churchill, who was the Stags Captain for that year. Brian, and everyone else apparently, attributes the success to his "master strategy" of leaving himself out of the team. It seems he was heavily influenced by the Ryder Cup, where the captain is non-playing and gets to zoom around the course in a buggy, encouraging his players and smiling at the cameras. By all accounts the strategy was welcomed by the team.....that's to say the bit about Brian not playing. They weren't too keen on him zooming about and encouraging, they found that a bit off-putting (no pun intended there). I also have it on good authority that spectators with cameras were none too pleased about him looming up in front of them and gurning like billy-o into the camera.

So, that's the background stuff out of the way - how went the day?

Everything, yes everything, was set fair to enable all 96 players to produce their best golf. The weather was pleasantly warm, ideal for playing and the course was in tip-top condition, great fairways with first cuts and excellent greens with nice aprons.

Not only that but as usual the Stags committee had delivered the goods and organised the competition to within an inch of its life. The setup for players to register was laid out such as to make it as easy as possible. There were "guides" laid on, each with a little placard to ferry the groups to the various tees and "spotters" were in place at various locations across the course to help speed up play. Some committee members were even seen to be swanning around in a buggy just to check that all was going smoothly and definitely not, as some jaundiced attendees observed, to have a laugh and pass the time.

But it didn't end there, oh no, not by a long chalk. The post-competition organisation was also pretty swish. Scorecards were processed with great efficiency and the entertainment for the elderly went down well, you know, all the stuff that old folks love, raffles etc. We could barely contain ourselves.

The grand nosh-up, too, was first class. The dining tables, set up by Cherry and her staff, looked very classy. Each club had their own table which highlighted the fact that this was a competition and not just a nice social outing. It also gave each player the opportunity to whinge about their own misfortunes and moan about the undeserved good luck the other players in their group had benefited from. There was also, I'm afraid to say, a fair bit of schadenfreude going on at all the tables with a liberal smattering of golfers revelling in the bad luck, absolutely deserved of course, of fellow players. Such was the lack of Corinthian spirit that our very own Richard "the gent" Parham was constantly having nosebleeds. The poor chap must have got through several packs of tissues.

The meal itself, a delicious roast meat carvery with lashings of sides (veg. roast pots etc.) was a great success. You know, I think one of the great pluses of a carvery is that it is positioned out in the restaurant. The hungry horde can savour the wonderful smell of the food and salivate in anticipation. Now, to carry this off in something approaching a civilised manner requires some organising. Nobody, I'm sure, would relish the sight of a ravenous mob descending at speed on the carvery. Fortunately, young Johnny had everything under control. Servings would be by team. In a pre-designated order a team would approach the carvery, be served and return to their table, to be followed to the carvery by another team etc. etc. Fortunately, for Paul Turner's blood pressure, young Johnny had decreed that Stoneleigh, as the hosts of the competition, would be served first. Paul, for those who are

unaware, is a chap who, whilst normally calm and almost fetishist in his desire to retain his "svelte" appearance, nonetheless can turn into the wild man of the woods if kept waiting to strap on the old nosebag.

Before I move on from the victualling part of this tale, I would just like to introduce a bit of culture in the form of a literary note to the proceedings. When I mentioned earlier about the smell of the carvery, it brought to mind an aspect highlighted in a work by Marcel Proust, a favourite author of mine. Old Marcel wrote a wonderful novel, "In Search of Lost Time" (actually that wasn't the title, he was French so obviously it was a French title,...but no matter). An important theme of this novel is about involuntary memory. There is an example of this, famously known as the episode of the madeleine, where long forgotten sensations are experienced on tasting a small cake (a madeleine) with a sip of tea.

"when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain"

The smell and taste of things remain - this made me think that, for the winners of this competition, long into the future the smell of a carvery will bring back to them the feelings they hadalthough.....hang on a bit....all the players are well into their last lap and galloping towards oblivion, so..... we're likely to be the "dead", "broken" and "scattered".....oh, bugger!

Anyway, if you haven't read Monsieur Proust's masterwork but would like to give it a go, I should start now, it's about 3,000 pages long. It's well worth it though, a gag and a bellylaugh on nearly every page.

OK, we've had all the pre and post match information. What about the actual results of the competition?

As the teams were segregated at their own table it's difficult to know how others were dealing with the tension of knowing their own score but not the other teams' scores. On the Stags' table there was a constant rollercoaster careering from very optimistic to very pessimistic. Both observing and being part of this was at once completely surreal and yet somehow well-balanced. The only constant at the Stoneleigh table was old Bernie Ray's blues. Old Bernie Ray's blues - it sounds like it should start "woke up this mornin'" and be sung by a man with a gravelly voice and a twangy acoustic guitar. But no, this was Bernie's sadness at being Stoneleigh's eighth man, the lowest score which didn't count. We tried to comfort him, although in all honesty not too hard as each man was himself relieved not be the dreaded "eighth man".

As the results were read out in reverse order the tension became almost unbearable and the scattered sound of grown men sobbing only made things worse or, I suppose, funny, depending on your character and sense of humour.

Eventually only the first and second places remained and the two teams left standing were Atherstone and Stoneleigh. An agonised groan ran round the room - fortunately John chased it, caught it and since it hadn't registered he threw it out.

And then, piling tension on tension, it transpired that both teams had the same scores (I've already done the "agonised groan" thing haven't I?").

Do you recall way back when I was outlining the format, I told you to remember what would happen in the event of a tie because it was important? Well, do you? I knew you wouldn't.

After 96 players had given their all, it was finally to come down to the two worst scores in the best two teams. You really couldn't make it up, could you?

The results were read out: Bernie Ray of Stoneleigh - 30points.

Gary King of Atherstone - 21 points.

Winners of the John Reay Trophy 2016 - Stoneleigh Stags.

Bernie could emerge from his blue mood and bask in the sunlight for ensuring victory for the Stags. From zero to hero in the blink of an eye. But spare a thought for poor old Gaz King. I'm sure his teammates will be very supportive and encouraging. They're not the kind of chaps to constantly remind him of this at any and every opportunity - are they?

So there you have it. Stoneleigh Stags win the Trophy for the second time. Every member of the team a hero. And once again a huge thank you to the committee for all the work they put into it. A big thank you to all the guides and spotters. A big thank you to John, Cherry, young Johnny and all the staff at Stoneleigh.

It was an all-round triumph!

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