

SUFFOLK GOLF UNION

President's Report

2018 Annual General Meeting

Introduction

I am pleased to present my report, for my first year in office, to the 2018 Annual General Meeting.

Personnel

Suffolk is very fortunate indeed to benefit from the hard work and dedication of so many people who give their time freely to support County golf. The Executive Committee, the Junior Committee and our coaching teams work so hard to provide excellent opportunities for amateur golfers in Suffolk to demonstrate their skills and to fulfil their personal goals. Further afield our England Golf representative, Tony Rubin has carried forward Suffolk's views very effectively and Mike Rees, as President of the England Golf South East group, represents Suffolk well on the wider stage. My personal thanks go to my vice-president, Bill Darling, who has given me unstinting support.

I should like to make special mention here of our Head Coach, Keith Preston, who is in his 25th year in that role. Many County golfers owe a great debt to Keith for his support and professional help as they have made their way through the County teams and in many cases into the professional ranks. The SGU is most grateful to Keith for his continuing support and consistently going 'beyond the call of duty'.

Finances

We have been very fortunate indeed to secure the services of County Treasurer, Peter Sledmere, who keeps a very tight rein on expenditure and with the much welcomed help from our clubs has managed a very smooth transition to 'real time' affiliation fee collections. At the same time Peter has put a great deal of work into the proposed incorporation of the Union. SGU finances remain in good shape and we have again been able to hold affiliation fees at the same level.

Although, along with national trends, there continues to be a decline in the overall number of club members we have fared reasonably well in Suffolk thanks to the hard work by clubs in recruiting and retaining members. The number of members in Suffolk fell by 2.4% between 2015 and 2017 but between 2016 and 2017 the decline was less than 0.5%. Let's hope we can soon see some upward movement!

In the last couple of months two sponsorship deals have been agreed with the SGU and although there are initial additional costs involved there will be a worthwhile net benefit to County golf over the coming three/four years.

Championships

Many congratulations to Chris Bartrum and James Biggs (both Diss) who became the first pair in the history of the SGU to win the Amateur Foursomes for the third consecutive year. James then went on to become the County Amateur Champion and in the process achieved a new course record score of 63 in his morning round. Alfie Halil (Flempton) is the 2017 Open Champion at the age of 16 – 36 years after Paul Buckle won the title at the same age. The Match-play Champion is Louis Martin, aged 17, (Haverhill) and Harvey Watts (Newton Green) retained the Junior Match-play Championship. The Junior Championship was won at

Felixstowe Ferry by 16 year old Conal Downing (Rookery Park). Playing on his own course Paul Whiting (Bungay & Waveney Valley) won the Seniors Championship

Further details of all County events can be found on the SGU website but below is a list of the main competition results: -

Amateur Foursomes:	Chris Bartrum & James Biggs
Amateur Champion:	James Biggs
Open Champion:	Alfie Halil
Seniors' Champion:	Paul Whiting
Junior Champion:	Conal Downing
Men's Match-play Champion	Louis Martin
Junior Match-play Champion	Harvey Watts
Men's Club Team Champions	Diss

Match-play Competition winners: -

Stenson Shield	Aldeburgh
Hambro Cup	Bury St Edmunds
Tolly Cobbold Cup	Ufford Park
Parks Trophy	Ipswich
Beaumont Cup	Bury St Edmunds
Junior Club Champions	Newton Green

Congratulations to all the clubs and individual winners listed above.

Clubs will be aware that after a trial year of changes to the handicap criteria for the Parks Trophy and the Beaumont Cup it has been decided to revert to the previous limits of up to 12 for the Parks and 13 to 20 for the Beaumont.

Men's Teams

Unfortunately it was generally a very disappointing year for the first and second teams. After an encouraging first day at Seacroft in the Eastern Inter Counties Foursomes we slipped away on day 2 to finish with the wooden spoon, just half a point behind Northamptonshire. In the Anglian League, despite some very close matches, the first team failed to gain a point and the second team managed only one halved match.

County Captain, Jack Cardy and Second Team Captain, Joe Cardy remain optimistic for 2018 and with a great squad spirit, some changes to the winter coaching and the introduction of some new talented players we expect to perform well.

Juniors

We are very fortunate to have a strong and very dedicated team of managers under the expert guidance of Trevor Mason, Chairman, Junior Golf. Patrick Spraggs (U18's), Jim Harrison (U16's) and Ashley Hughes, greatly supported by Mike Stevenson (U14's & U12's) give an enormous amount of time and hard work to encouraging our youngsters and we have seen some excellent performances from individuals and our teams. You will have seen earlier in my report that the winners of the Open Championship and the Men's Match-play were both juniors. George Fricker (Ufford Park) was selected to play for England Schools and Habebul Islam came 4th in the McGregor Trophy. Our under 16's retained the Tom Finn Trophy and were runners-up in the new England Golf South East Group Northern Division league. Our under 18's also finished 2nd in the South East Group Northern Division league. The future looks very bright for this cohort of boys.

Seniors

Kevin Brooks, Seniors County Captain, continues to lead his squad of County Seniors enthusiastically and I am delighted that he has agreed to continue as Captain for 2018. The England Golf South East Group Seniors Foursomes qualifier was held at Aldeburgh and our team performed well and led at lunchtime only to be pipped at the post by Cambridgeshire who won all their afternoon matches. Having lost their opening match narrowly away at Northamptonshire in the East Anglian Seniors League, the team won against Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and halved their match with Lincolnshire. With an excellent tally of 30 matches won, Suffolk were crowned EASL Champions.

Course Assessments/Handicapping

David Barnes and his team continue to make progress with course assessments. 7 courses were rated in 2017 under the USGA Course Rating System and a further 7 are planned for 2018 with the programme being completed in Suffolk by the end of 2020. As each course is rated the club receives notice of the Standard Scratch and Slope Rating from England Golf. Preparations are now in hand for the introduction of a Worldwide Handicapping System with presentations, within counties, in April and October 2018 to which clubs will be invited to send 2 delegates. The approach is likely to use the best 8 rounds from a player's last 20 rounds to calculate their Handicap Index.

Five clubs in Suffolk have so far opted to introduce 'Gender Free Tees'. In three cases this is after a formal rating and with the other two clubs England Golf has provided temporary SSS pending formal rating in the next two years.

Communications/Media

We are very fortunate indeed to receive such excellent support from Tony Garnett who makes a massive contribution to the publicity that our sport receives in the County. Tony gives up a huge amount of his own time to attend events and matches and his regular newspaper articles give us coverage that we could not possibly achieve without him – many thanks Tony.

Thank you also to all the clubs, individuals and organisations which support the Suffolk and Norfolk Magazine. We are indebted to Linda Basham for her excellent work in producing the bi-monthly issues which give such prominence to our sport across Suffolk and Norfolk.

The SGU Executive has taken a decision to commission a major upgrade to our website using the Intelligent Golf platform. The work will be carried out in the autumn of 2018 so that everything is in place for the 2019 season and is expected to make the website much more user friendly, provide the SGU with e-mail templates, tournament facilities and a better tool to help the business run more effectively.

In Conclusion

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year as your President which has given me the opportunity to visit many of our great Suffolk Clubs and meet with a huge number of members/players within the County and beyond. The support we receive from our Club Secretaries/Managers is second to none and I remain extremely grateful to them for their co-operation and the welcome given to the players and officials.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our County Secretary, Charlie Wilderspin for all the work he does quietly but so effectively behind the scenes. His dedication to Suffolk Golf is second to none and his personal support to me is greatly appreciated.

2017 has provided many highlights particularly for some of our young golfers and for our Seniors team and I am hopeful that 2018 will be even more exciting for individuals and teams across the County.

Colin Firmin
President
Suffolk Golf Union
February 2018