

KINGS CHURCH GOLF SOCIETY – 7th October 2006



Although a couple of key players failed late fitness tests, there was still a healthy turnout for the last Kings Church Golf Society outing of 2006. As usual, Blue Mountain provided more bacon sandwiches than was strictly necessary for a group of fit young athletes, but as Matt Bailey was the only one present, we didn't complain.

In particular, Jeff Dever benefited from the hearty lunch (a swift visit to the driving range may also have helped) as he made a great start with a perfect pitch to the first. This was followed in similar fashion on the next two holes, but thereafter Jeff's afternoon tailed off as he picked up just 4 points in 4 holes from the 8th to the 11th. Playing partner Graham Stewart also started well, especially as he parred the long and awkward second to pick up one of his two four-point returns for the day. That Graham scored 40% of his total on the 2nd and 12th says something about the patchy nature of his round, but four-point holes were as rare as happy English football fans.

Indeed, the only other player to pick up four points twice was Patrick Hopkinson. In the group behind Graham's, Patrick managed nett-birdies on the par-3 4th and again on the longer, dog-leg 10th. Flushed with his success, Patrick then won the Nearest the Pin prize on the 11th (nobody came close to threatening his marker all afternoon), but later a horrible water-related mess at the 16th cost him a central role at the post-match ceremonials.

Back to the first group – David Payne's golf has improved steadily this year and his handicap is going in the right direction (*clearly playing too much – Ed.*). We saw evidence aplenty on the front nine as David racked up 3 points on five consecutive holes from the 3rd. A great birdie on the 12th gave him four more points, but just four in total over the closing four holes as his mind was already wandering towards a beach in the Bahamas meant David would have a trophy-shaped empty space on his mantelpiece all winter.

The third group's golf was both feast and famine. Considering how little he's played since his skiing mishap, Peter Ashall had a feast day, with 12 points after just 5 holes and 20 over the front nine. Holes 10 and 11 saw him scrambling like a latecomer trying to find a seat on a Sunday morning, while at the 12th Peter appeared to be practicing for some sort of hedge-clearance competition. Nevertheless, a great finish which included the Longest Drive prize on the 17th (just over 210 yards, comfortably past Jeff's earlier leading effort) gave Peter an even-par 36 points for the day and the added bonus that his handicap won't change for 2007!

Moping around in Peter's wake, Mr Mallac and I were famine personified (hard to picture, I know). I've never played the first at Blue Mountain well, but an 8 after getting stuck behind the hedge was possibly my worst ever. I did manage to hit the (correct) green from the 4th tee and make par there, while a cunning cannon off a worm-cast on the 9th green meant a rare success on the putting front, but overall it was a desperate, best forgotten, afternoon for your correspondent.

David's start was decent enough, but his 4-putt (or four-putt as they would have said on the old videoprinter) on the fourth hole darkened his mood considerably – odd, because it seemed to cheer Peter up! David's fabulous approach to the 5th after dropping out of the ditch was a very rare shaft of sunlight on the front nine. Things had got so bad by the 12th that David played his tee-shot from the women's tee; Peter and I managed to stop laughing long enough to point out his

error, but such was our pity on the poor chap that we allowed him a free retake. *[Editor's Note: following some post-event bargaining, it was agreed that I would only report this incident to you, dear reader, in return for pointing out that Mr Mallac did eventually achieve a par four on this hole. I am, of course, delighted to do so.]* Anyway, David's round finished respectably enough, but it wasn't one that he or I will recall fondly as we warm our toes by the fire in deep midwinter.

The final group contained four proper golfers, and the standard was noticeably higher than some of the aforementioned hacking and hedge-mutilation. David, Peter and I watched in admiration as Tony Wilson played out of the greenside bunker on the 2nd hole to three feet, accompanied by Tiger-esque side- and back-spin. Tony had parred the first, and this shot allowed him to do likewise on the second; he proceeded to do the same on the fifth, but thereafter slowly faded. In contrast, Jimmy McGregor had a quiet start with just 3 points from the opening three holes, but he fought back to birdie the 7th, officially the hardest hole on the course, and finish respectably before jetting off into the sunset.

Barry began well, taking 19 points from the front nine, but a poor stretch between 12 and 15 set him back. On the other hand, Matt Bailey scored on every hole and had a stunning back nine, scoring 21 points to lift his total to 37 for the day and second place overall. Early favourite Michael Goodwin, resplendent in shorts as is his custom even in a wet October in England, was consistency personified as he parred ten of the first 12 holes against his (possibly generous) handicap. His card (scandalously completed by Mr Hopkinson with numbers randomly scribbled like some sort of herbally-challenged Sudoku player) showed nothing worse than a six for any hole but not enough real highlights to succeed amongst such exalted company. Our South African friend had a notable Nearest the Pin in Two victories on the 8th (notable in that he wasn't really very close at all but none of us could do better); however, it was a run-of-the-mill afternoon for the mercurial Mr Goodwin.

Along with patience and faith, consistency is, however, a valuable virtue on a Kings Church Golf Day. Like Matt, Andy Pettit scored at least a point on every hole, managed 3 points on six holes between the third and the eleventh, and rounded things off with a four-point par 4 on the long 17th. 21 points on the front nine and 19 coming home represented a superb day's work for Andy (especially with his webbed hands and feet after 36 holes the day before in monsoon conditions), and he duly ensured that the Society Trophy stayed in Priest Avenue for yet another winter.

Following a few swift halves at the 19th hole, most of us popped home to powder our noses and collect better halves for the annual end-of-season celebration and awards evening. The Trotts' garden was transformed from its usual mix of desert and jungle with the help of the latest in split-level gazebos courtesy of the Paynes', while Jo laid on some fabulous food and drink to ensure that our afternoon's efforts were suitably rewarded. Accompanied by a photographic display of our endeavours earlier this summer, courtesy of Snapper Ashall, the 2006 awards were distributed. 31 golfers have ventured out under the KCGS banner this year, but there's still room for more to join us in 2007. Jimmy McGregor has brought some great weather with him from Houston since Easter – I'm confident that next year will be better still.

7th October Prize-winners:

1st: Andy Pettit

2nd: Matt Bailey

Best High-handicapper: David Payne

Nearest the Pin: Patrick Hopkinson

Nearest the Pin in Two: Michael Goodwin

Longest Drive: Peter Ashall

Kings Church Golf Society 2006 Awards:

Champion Golfer of the Year: Barry Bailey

Most Improved Golfer: Graham Stewart

Best High-Handicap Player: Richard Dry

Longest Driver Champion: Barry Bailey

Nearest the Pin Champion: David Mallac