

Tournament Reports – West Masters O65 & O60 11/12th June 2022

O65 at Timperley



Back row (from left: Grossmith, Smith, Sherwood, Osbourne, Webb, Finnimore, Ward, Hemming, Booker (Manager)
Front row: Richards, Sykes, Mumford, Wiseman, Skinner (Capt), Leatt, Brailey, Jenkins.

After trials and four practice games, this group of West players was well prepared to take on the challenge of exceeding last year's second place at Wakefield.

We assembled at Deeside Ramblers HC on Friday evening for a final session, breaking out the excellent new West kit and walking through all our short corner plans. After an excellent meal at the nearby Fox & Barrel we decamped to our hotel at Runcorn (nearest we could get to Timperley as Ed Sheeran was at the Etihad all weekend and Heaton Park was staging another mega music event).

Day One:

South Central/S.East 0 – West 2

Arriving at Timperley early, we had another brief skills session at 9.30am ready for the commencement of battle at 11.50 against the South (South Central/South East). West made a fast start and soon put South under pressure, winning a number of short corners in the process. South star player and England captain was limited to occasional forays forward by Mumford in midfield ably assisted by Brailey, Leatt, Hemming and Skinner. Using the full squad effectively, West

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maintained a good pressing game and exploited an attacking formation with Richards and Smith going close, Skinner driving through from midfield and Wiseman, Sykes and Sherwood providing width and penetration from the flanks. This pressure eventually led to our first goal as a D entry from the right was cleverly spread to the left for Skinner to ghost in and put West into a deserved lead.

The second half continued in the same vein although West tired a little allowing South to come back into the game more. However, well organised defence from Ward, Grossmith, Finnimore, Osbourne and Jenkins and some match saving blocks from Webby in goal kept them out. Meanwhile our attacks were made more effective with great skills from Richards in their 23 and good movement from Smith allowing opportunities to open up from our intelligent use of the ball in the D. Another attack late in the game led to a stroke and skipper Skinner took the responsibility to put the game beyond South's reach. A real team effort with everyone contributing.

East 1 – West 2

East were clearly on their toes after seeing our performance against South. However, we played well but gradually eased off, possibly as reaction to the herculean efforts against South? East gained control and we conceded late in the first half. A stern team talk later we recovered some of our composure and were rewarded by Sherwood's equaliser from a penalty corner early in the second half. The game then ebbed and flowed with good chances for both sides. Richards and Smith making runs into their 23 again causing havoc and eventually a melee near the penalty spot resulted in Richards putting the ball in from short range with 6 mins left to go. Despite the return of some more nervous play, the clock ran down to herald another victory for West. Winning ugly is still winning!

Yorks/North East 0 – West 0

Needing to notch up a good win to take a very strong position for the second day, we again relaxed too much and let Yorks/NE get into the game. Chances for both sides benefitted Yorks/NE most as they were the underdogs with little to lose. A tense game where we struggled to dominate and ran out the draw to give us the same points and goal difference as Midlands heading into Day 2.

Day two:

West 0 – Midlands 0

This was the key game and our opportunity to put us in a dominant position to win. However, our opposition were strong both individually and as a team. A balanced game with periods of pressure from both sides yielding reasonable chances and good numbers of penalty corners. Webby in goal kept us in it a number of times but was stranded on the p spot when the ball crossed quickly from the right to the left side of the D exposing a direct and open goal. Fortunately, the Midlands forward hurried his attempt and the opportunity was lost. West breathed a sigh of relief then redoubled efforts to come back strongly. However, neither side could convert further chances and penalty corners and the resulting draw left both teams level going into their final game with West to play North West first.

West 3 – North West 0

Determined to recover the form of the first game, we started strongly and created six or seven good chances but failed to convert. This emboldened NW and they started to get into the game as West dropped off and reduced intensity. Tired legs were the order of the day by now though as both sides had played nearly two hours of hockey in the summer conditions. Realising this West rotated players rapidly and stepped back on the gas. Smith converted this pressure well to give West the lead mid-

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way through the first half and it looked as though the goal rush was to come. It was not to be and after a great piece of improvisation by Wiseman trying to lob their keeper, again we eased off in the tiring conditions leading to half time. We started the second half strongly and good width saw the move find Smith at the back of the D from where he roofed an excellent finish. Again the cycle of easing off to rest then step up again slowed our scoring rate significantly. In our last phase of positive pressure we again got down the flanks better and Skinner and Mumford were more dominant in midfield. Our pressure eventually led to a third goal and a well deserved hat-trick for Smith. A good win but the group felt disappointed not to have added more to the tally.

The final result:

Midlands went into their game against Yorks/NE knowing they had to win by 4 goals. Fortunately, Yorks /NE hadn't read the script and played well defending resolutely. Midlands, whilst in charge, struggled to convert but scored regularly leaving West to sweat it out from the spectators gallery. Like us both sides were tired but mistakes didn't help Midlands convert and they ran out 3-0 winners to tie with West.

Both teams were very tired and a penalty shootout was declined in favour of sharing the Trophy. A coin toss to see who took the single set of winners' medals went to Midlands. The day ended with honours evenly split between two very able and skilful teams to complete an excellent weekend of hockey in the new format. The North were courageous to make the change and enter teams from both their new areas but it was disappointing to see South field only one team. Next year will be interesting to see if all eight new areas field teams as required. For this year, joint winners is a worthy continuation in the progress of the West group and met objectives to better the runners-up slot achieved at Wakefield. All to play for next year!

Chris Booker – Manager
16th June 2022

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O60 at Woking

West Squad: Steve Alderton, John Barratt, Andy Batchelor, Jon Bland, Nigel Bower, Steve Foster, Rod Naughalty, John Partridge, Gray Vinnicombe, Roger White, Mike Wingent (C)
Admitted on Temporary Visas: David Cole, Brian Edwards, Shane Lovett, Rob Hurry
Coach: Ashley James
Mascot: Rob Brown (GK)

The Tournament

The first outing for the newly constituted 'Eight Areas' tournament, replacing the previous 'Five Regions', was somewhat hobbled by the 'South' who, although managing to cope with the prompt shedding of London (and I think we can all identify with that) couldn't get to grips with the concept of an East and a Central geographical division of the vast swathes of the home counties, preferring a division along the lines of 'the Very Rich' and 'the Exorbitantly Rich'; we await the EH decision on that for next year. As it was, a seven-team round-robin of 30-minute matches over two days turned out to be an excellent format.

The Venue

Woking HC on a sunny weekend was an excellent venue for the tournament. Easy to get to (unless you live 'up North like') and located in a very pleasant rural suburb. Ample parking for as many climate-destroying SUV's as the Grand Master hockey fraternity could wish for and two very well-prepared sand-based Astro's with a 'functional' clubhouse and bar where you could legitimately claim you'd drunk TEA all day! I'm told the food on offer was up to Heston standards (whether that referred to the renowned Chef or the equally renowned M4 Services wasn't specified). Woking is famous for being the location of HG Wells' magnum opus 'The War of the Worlds' and to be fair I think the town centre is well on the way to recovering from the devastation wreaked by the tripod invaders. Just give it a few more years. Though it may have suffered a setback due to the late Saturday evening invasion of the Slug and Lettuce by Brown and Hurry.

The West Performance

Game 1 v London D 0-0: Rob Brown was able to sleep for the majority of this game while the

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rest of the team found more and more inventive ways not to score. Umpiring advantage was set at 5 nano seconds which was little help to Andy Batchelor who, on several occasions, felt the need to discuss calmly and knowledgeably rule 12.1 with the match officials.

Game 2 v Midlands L 0-1: A terrific tussle against the pre-tournament favourites. The only difference between the teams here being a penalty stroke after an unidentified defender made a brilliant intervention to stop a certain goal – with his foot!

Game 3 v North-West W 2-1: By early afternoon the team had acclimatised to the sub-tropical heat but after 10 attempts, short corners were abandoned as a tactic. Steve Alderton and Andy Batchelor scoring one each from open play to compensate.

Game 4 v South (C&E) W 2-0: Normally a match of some intensity, the South (C&E) were rather limp, perhaps contemplating their impending divorce. Anyway, West dominated the match and were unfortunate to score only twice, from Rod Naughalty and Andy Batchelor, despite increasing their short corner practice count by a further 12.

Game 5 v East L 0-1: Perhaps a little diminished by the previous night's revels in Woking? This was a must-win match to retain any chance of finishing as top team. The short corner count hit a tournament high of 22 (there was barely any time for open play) but conversion to goals remained steadfastly at zero. A slow-motion PC was conceded just before half time – the Easts only attempt on goal!

Game 6 v North-East & Yorkshire W 2-1: John Barratt became the only casualty of the tournament, having had his rib cage 'tickled' by South (C&E) the previous day, he decided to sit this one out. Fortunately, so did many of the NE&Y team who found this just one match too far. Goals from Jon Bland and Rob Hurry won the game though Rob Brown was called on to make some brilliantly athletic overhead saves late on (Is that OK Rob, I think that's what you told me to write?).

Discipline

A very important topic in these times of political self-service, post truth and the demise of chivalry in all walks of life. Happy to report that there were only three cards received, all green and all fiercely contested by the recipients: Barratt, Hurry and Edwards. In a fair and impartial attempt to get to the truth an emergency Cobra meeting (well, a lot of Cobra was certainly involved!) was called at Saturday evenings Indian restaurant of choice. After some impassioned and frankly moving words of defence by each of the potential perpetrators a 'secret' ballot was held chaired by Judge Bower resulting in a resounding verdict of GUILTY for Edwards on too many counts to detail here, several not even related to hockey, and by 20 votes to nil despite there being only 18 voters! His Temporary Visa has since been revoked.

Overview

Excellent tournament format, team, venue and weather. 4th place. Roll-on 2023!

Post Script:

Pulling a squad together for such tournaments is never, ever, easy – invitations to potential participants, trials & warm-up games to be sorted with venues, kit orders, etc. Our massive thanks go to Mike Wingent for the time and organisation he has put in to get the best squad possible to Woking – plus for his captaining on the pitch. Good on you, sir!