

RLSBC Finals Weekend Report – Saturday 9th & Sunday 10th September 2023

Spectators, both club members and competitors' friends/families who came along to watch and support, were treated to some exciting bowls at the club's finals last weekend which, apart from a short Sunday afternoon shower, were played in some excellent late summer sunshine.

The Saturday morning session involved a number of pairs matches. In the men's 3-Wood competition, Ian Plant and Dave Gardner took on Andrew Scares and Ray White. Ian and Dave were always just ahead and went into the last end 2 shots up. Despite the best efforts of Andrew and Ray, Ian and Dave held on, taking another 2 shots to lift the Jubilee Cup with a final score of 16-12.

On another rink, Dave French and Neil Weston faced Malcolm Hayes and Malcolm Wickens in the 4-Wood competition for the Donald Bowl trophy. By the halfway point, Dave and Neil held an 8 shot advantage and despite a brief rally from the two Malcolms, a strong finish by Dave and Neil saw the game conceded after 17 ends with them 23-14 ahead.

The final match of the Saturday morning session featured last year's champions Anita Cowdrill and Graham White defending their Mixed Pairs title against Christine Leigh and Bill Claridge. With Bonny Claridge sidelined and out of action since July due to a knee injury, Christine had stepped in as a substitute to play with Bill from the semi-final onwards. From the very start of the game, the 2022 champions were on the back-foot as Christine and Bill gradually eased ahead and with the pair holding a 21-9 lead with just one end left to play, Anita and Graham conceded, passing their crown to Christine and Bill. It could be an interesting discussion in the Claridge household at the start of next season as to who Bill plays with in the 2024 competition !!

After players, officials and spectators had sat down to an excellent buffet lunch, the Saturday afternoon session got underway, beneath a blisteringly hot sun and with the mercury levels now up around the 30°C mark.

In the ladies' 2-Wood Singles final, Anita Cowdrill was in action again, playing Sandra Payne. Anita's form matched the weather (hot !) and at times her woods seemed to be magnetically attracted to the jack as she stormed ahead and with just 14 ends played and holding an unassailable 17-2 lead, Sandra conceded.

Also out on the green for the second time on the day was Christine Leigh, playing Caroline Williams in the Sadler Cup, the 4-wood singles competition for ladies who have not previously won a singles competition of any sort. A very close match for a long time, saw the scores tied at 10-10 after 15 ends, but Christine then gradually eased ahead to take her second title of the weekend, by 21 shots to 14.

In the last of the games played on Saturday afternoon, there was a dramatic finish to the ladies Drawn Pairs final, where Pauline Macdonald and Enid Reece played Pauline Dineley and Jane Wigman. Tied at 9-9 at the halfway point and then 14-14 with just 2 ends remaining, Pauline Dineley and Jane scored 4 shots on the penultimate end to take a 4-shot lead into the final end and put themselves into prime position to lift the Millennium Bowl trophy. However, a disastrous 18th end for them saw Pauline Macdonald and Enid pick up 7 shots with Enid not needing to bowl her last wood, as they won the match by 21 shots 18.

Sunday morning's session started in slightly cooler conditions than for the preceding day and in the ladies Chosen Pairs competition, Pauline Dineley and Jane Wigman had a second chance of a title as they faced 2018 winners, Anita Cowdrill and Tracey Turner-Smith. However, it wasn't to be, as Anita and Tracey proved far too strong, opening up a 12-2 lead after just 7 ends. They continued to pick up multiple shot counts and with 17 of the 18 ends completed, Pauline and Jane conceded, Anita and Tracey taking the Maycock Hill Cup by a margin of 26 shots to 11.

Also played on Sunday morning was the men's Handicap 4-Wood Singles final, where 2016 winner Dave Payne took on Mervyn Taylor. Looking to reach a target of 23 shots to Mervyn's 21, Dave started strongly, dropping

shots on only 2 of the first 13 ends, to build a 15-5 advantage. However, a good run of winning ends brought Mervyn right back into the contest, to trail by just a single shot, 13-14. Mervyn couldn't maintain the run though and Dave took shots on 6 of the next 7 ends to run out the winner 23-14 and lift the Thorburn Cup for the second time.

The last final played before the lunch break was for the Jeffs Cup, the men's competition for members who have not previously won a singles title. Paul Smith faced Tony Allibone, who was making his third appearance in the final of the competition, having been runner-up in both 2018 and 2022. Unfortunately for Tony, it wasn't to be 'third time lucky' as Paul built a commanding lead thanks to a number of high scoring ends. Tony did keep him pegged on 20 shots for a few ends though, before Paul got the one shot needed for victory. The final score was 21-7.

During the break for lunch, a fine drizzly rain started to fall, which continued as the afternoon's final session got underway. However, within about 30 minutes the sun reappeared and the latter stages of the final session of singles matches were played in hot and sunny conditions once more. These included both the men's and ladies Championship finals.

In the men's final, Graham White faced Tom Head. Unfortunately for Tom, Graham was in the sort of form that had made him club champion previously in 2019 and 2021. Consistent scoring by Graham soon enabled him to complete a 21-6 win and to lift the men's club Championship trophy for a third time in 5 years.

In the ladies Championship final, Graham's mum, Janice White, was up against current reigning ladies champion, Anita Cowdrill and the large crowd of spectators were not disappointed by a quality match where the upper hand swung to-and-fro. Janice started the game in determined fashion and built an early 8-2 lead only for Anita to show her champion's form by taking shots on the next 6 ends, to then lead herself by 13 shots to 8. However, Janice responded with a great run of scores to get within 2 shots of victory and lead the current champion 19-14. In a tense finish to the match Anita pulled it back to 19-all and then a brace of singles saw her complete a 21-19 win in game that was fitting for a Championship final and like Graham in the men's event, saw Anita lift the ladies' club Championship trophy for the third time in 5 years.

The final men's event to be played was the 2-Wood singles competition, where Malcolm Wickens and David Payne pretty much matched each other shot for shot. Tied 7-7 at the halfway point and 11-11 with 4 ends remaining, it was perhaps no surprise that the pair finished 13 shots apiece after the regulation 21 ends. It was Malcolm though that took the match and the Freeman Hardy and Willis Cup, with a single on the extra end.

The very last cup to be decided over the weekend was for the K. Wiles Trophy in the ladies' handicap final, where Christine Leigh and Dawn Horne faced each other. To take the title Dawn needed to reach 28 shots and Christine 21 shots and the match proved to be every bit as close and exciting as the ladies Championship final. In another high-quality game, the pair were tied at 4-4 (6 ends), 6-6 (10 ends) and 9-9 (15 ends), before Dawn pulled slightly ahead to lead 16-10 only for Christine to fight back and level the game at 17-17 after 26 ends. By now, this was the only game still playing and the good crowd of spectators were being treated to some excellent bowls in hot and humid, energy-sapping conditions for the players. Eventually, after just over 3 hours play and 34 ends, Christine took the ladies Handicap title, reaching her target of 21 shots with Dawn stranded on 23. A really great game to complete an excellent weekend's bowls.

As always, the club thanks the Competition Secretaries, Janice and Ray White for organising the competitions throughout the year and the finals weekend in particular, all those members who helped out over the weekend setting out the greens, marking finals, scoreboard turning and umpiring, Jane Whyatt and her team for excellent buffets on each day and Ray White and his team for keeping the bar going.