

Hockey Writer's Club AGM 15th January 2020.



Present:

Charles Randall
Susan Edghill
Ken Wilson
Mike Haymonds
Rod Gilmour
Jade Bloomfield
Andy Mair
Michael Kurn
Judy Smith
Mike Smith
Ben Saunders

Apologies:

Lynne Morgan
Dil Bahra
Cathy Harris
David Chappell
Maurice Kittrell
Richard Stainthorpe
Patrick Rowley
Maurice Kittrell
Chris Brewer
Howard Bentham

2. Minutes of the last AGM held on 16th January 2019.

Were approved by the meeting proposed by Jade Bloomfield and seconded by Judy Smith.

3. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising that are not featured on this year's AGM.

4. Chairman's Report – Charles Randall.

"The year 2019 has been reasonably encouraging for hockey journalism, thanks to the return of The Hockey Paper as a monthly edition and the consolidation of Hockey World News.

As the Great Britain men's and women's teams managed to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, albeit with difficulty, hockey should regain some media profile in 2020.

The women's gold medal in Rio in 2016 sparked a surge of interest in hockey participation, but did not inspire the national media to cover this newsy sport ... which is disappointing for hockey and for journalism.

Indeed the Daily Telegraph at the end of December published a series of articles describing "Moments of the Decade" across the sports. These moments included the England women's football team not winning the World Cup in 2015 - bronze only - and (for some reason) the child molestation scandal in gymnastics of 2018 in the United States. More relevant was England netball's admirable Commonwealth Games gold of 2018. Yet hockey received no mention at all. The women's gold of 2016, seen by nine million on BBC, was deemed less worthy. The Daily Telegraph on line have granted Rod Gilmour a Women's Hockey Talking Points column through the season, which is a good thing. Nevertheless hockey infrequently reaches the printed page.

There have been issues with England Hockey's service to reporters, especially at the Lee Valley stadium. Even basic information such as caps for England players and opponents are not supplied, match reports sometimes contain inaccuracies and the wi-fi at Lee Valley has been frustratingly intermittent.

Craig Mortimer-Zhika, the EH media manager, agreed that wi-fi was sub-standard and said he would "pick up on this" with the owners of the venue before the Pro League resumes. He added that there was good internet access via wired connections in the tribunes and media room.

Craig said supplying basic information was a "good suggestion" while adding that EH had a couple of factors to consider, for example updating in double-header Pro League weekends.

There is little the HWC can do to improve journalistic access apart from passing on complaints to the EH media department. It would help if journalists could contact EH direct to make them aware of errors so that the service can be improved; it has been noted that the EH can be unreliable on detail and information rigour. Generally it seems that the EH prefer to push journalists towards researching for themselves on internet.

The HWC committee has been weakened by the loss of Maurice Kittrell through ill-health and Tom Cooper, moving away to Derbyshire. Tom continued his involvement with the club's website; Maurice's brave battle against sepsis caused his resignation before the AGM.

I would like to pay tribute to a strong and active committee and to thank them for their energy keeping the HWC alive and relevant. Inevitably much time is spent on organising the annual lunch and fixing the awards, but this event is far from trivial. The sport of hockey would be poorer without it."

5. Secretary's report – Ken Wilson.

As Charles has mentioned it was a busy year for hockey in this country and the Pro-League and the Olympic qualifiers saw plenty of action at Lee Valley and the Stoop – the home of Harlequins rugby club.

We saw plenty of journalists and photographers covering the sport at those times – but most have to cover other sports to make a living. We are lucky to have Rod and Jade on our committee who in the main make their living writing about hockey.

We were lucky to sign up two new members this year - Ben Saunders who wrote on Hockey for the Morning Star and more recently the "I paper" and photographer Andy Mair who takes images for "Umpirecam."

As Charles also mentioned that long standing committee member Maurice Kittrell has resigned from our committee due to poor health. I spoke to him yesterday and wanted to read out this email I received from him.

"Dear Ken

Thank you for your call today, and it is with much regret that I confirm that I will not be able to attend the annual lunch. Although more than a year has passed since I collapsed on a plane returning from holiday, and subsequently diagnosed with meningitis and sepsis, I have not recovered my ability to walk without the aid of walking frames and the use of a wheelchair. It may be some time before nature repairs the damaged nerves.

In the circumstances I feel that the committee would be better served if I stand down and allow a more active person to participate in the HW's. I think that it will be several months before I can travel unaided. I will miss the lunch – please convey my best wishes to all."

Maurice was a very active member of the committee for many years and kept the youth awards going almost single handed for a lot of that time. He still wants to stay in touch and we will miss his input on the committee.

6. Treasurers' Report – Susan Edghill.

Susan presented the accounts for 2019 and said that despite approaching several people after last year's lunch we had been unable to secure a new sponsor for the youth awards. She said the lunch provided by RTYC had gone up by £6 from £32 to £38 per meal, but that included ½ bottle of wine per person and that included the drinks reception. She said there had been more late dropouts from the awards lunch than normal.

Mike Haymonds asked if the reserves were strong enough to survive another year without a sponsor for the youth awards. Susan said we could cover one more year, but that we had to take over possible increased costs into account.

Mike Smith said the balance of £19,000 in the reserves, suggested that the HWC could cover more than one year if no sponsor was forthcoming.

Charles suggested dropping the U16 awards to cut costs, but the meeting felt that would be a backward step and that they should stay.

Mike Smith asked what efforts were being made to get a sponsor. He also suggested getting a “no win no fee” sponsorship company involved.

The chairman said at the moment there was nothing planned to try and get a sponsor, but that he would mention in the awards lunch. Michael Kurn said his company had been approached to sponsor the youth awards for £4,000, but he wondered if that amount could be split into four to equal the awards to make it easier for companies to become involved without a big outlay. He said that would get more people to the awards lunch.

Jade Bloomfield said he would be prepared to head up the challenge of finding a new sponsor or sponsors for the youth awards for next year.

Pro League games with the squad being announced with a list of names and countries, but no clubs associated with them.

Mike said that Colin Pike is out there complaining and showing them their mistakes, but that they don't always reply to him. He said Colin issues to six people statistics including head to heads, past records etc.

Jade and Rod both said that they were invaluable. Jade said you would not expect a volunteer to do all that work and that England Hockey should employ him.

Mike Smith said the records held by England Hockey were incomplete. He said the current stats were alright, but he said there was a black hole of stats for around a decade (2000-2010) and that The Hockey Museum were working hard on getting a complete set in time for Tokyo 2020. He said he had a bunch of volunteers doing an unbelievable job all without help of England Hockey. He said volunteers were watching matches to get international players records. Although he said he had a very positive meeting with the new CEO of England Hockey, Nick Pink and he said he would more appreciative of the work they do.

Mike Smith said that the chairman should talk to Nick Pink and there should a delegation from HWC.

Mike Haymonds said that we were well past the excellent days of Jenny Byass and Lawrence West at England Hockey. Mike also called for a high-level meeting between England Hockey and the Hockey Writers Club.

Jade said England Hockey had stopped supplying club hockey photographs for the media and that he and others struggled to find images of teams such as Surbiton, making club coverage difficult to do. He said they are cutting back on everything to the detriment of the sport.

Mike Haymonds said that with the restructuring of the leagues coming up England Hockey would be running grassroots hockey. He also said that most money to run hockey came from UK sport and that the international set up were getting most of the cash.

8. HWC Bank account.

Susan said that the HWC account was quite antiquated and that we could not use it on-line or issue BACS payments etc.

Judy Smith said that you can get a bank account like the HWC one where you can do online transactions with person being able to oversee the account as well. The meeting agreed that we should look into updating the bank account. Susan will investigate.

9. The future of the Hockey Writers' Club.

Mike Haymonds asked what members got out of the Hockey Writers Club. He said, "UK members pay £10 a year and get £5 off the awards lunch if they attend. International members pay a one-off fee of ten pounds. What do we do for that? The committee spend 95% of their time discussing and arranging the lunch, but what else should we be doing. We used to arrange social events for visiting international journalists to Lea Valley, but that became too difficult."

The chairman Charles Randall said we represent hockey writers and that we overturned two rejected media accreditation requests for international tournaments at Lea Valley. We are a point of contact for England Hockey. He said with the new CEO at England Hockey we could get somewhere. He went on to say that the lunch is an important thing and the sport would be a poorer place without it. There was a long discussion on this subject.

Mike Haymonds said that we were putting a lot of hope on the new EH CEO (Nick Pink).

Mike Smith said the Hockey Writers' Club lacked an identity and could be doing more. He said it was valuable, if we've got Colin Pike and people like that who have a wealth of information, the HWC could be a point of contact for the writing community. Photographers could come on board and provide a service, but it would need organising.

Susan asked who would organise that.

Mike Smith reiterated that Surbiton pay Colin Pike but other material he prepares for fellow reporters is free.

Rod Gilmour said he wondered if we should have a photographer's award. He said there were lots of amateur photos on clubs Twitter accounts. Rod asked Mike Smith if we could get funding for that from the Hockey Foundation. Mike replied if it was for educational purposes. He said the HWC and the awards lunch could be bigger and said HWC should have more relevance and be more high profile. Charles Randall said we would raise it in committee.

Michael Kurn said we should delegate and not increase the workload for the committee. He said it was an amazing organisation, pulling people together for kudos and exposure and the HWC leads the way. HWC should become that come-to group to set up a subscription service and become a revenue stream. Jade said why we have lost sponsorship is that people don't know about us.

Michael Kurn said the club had a wealth of experience and were in prime position and could lead the way with things like stat packs etc. He said he would be happy to help raise the profile and come to the occasional committee meeting.

Mike Smith said The Hockey Museum were busy compiling historic stats, lists of GB and England capped players. He said they wanted to acknowledge those players. He said the HWC could incorporate one or two historic awards in the Lunch to acknowledge their achievements with a physical presentation. Charles said we could honour them but without the bling and Mike Smith replied that they are important people who didn't have a pile of bling.

Any Other Business:

Mike Haymonds said he was trying to put together the minute books of the Hockey Writers' Club, so The Hockey Museum would be in a position to pull together the history of the club. Unfortunately, he said there was a big section missing from 1972-1996, so the first 24 years of the club and another gap from 2009-2011. He said he hoped that they were somewhere in the late Bill Colwill's house and he would talk to his son Peter, when he is ready to see if he could try and find them.

The meeting closed at 11.57 am.