



CHELMSFORD HOCKEY CLUB

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024

By now you are probably aware that this is my last season as Chairman. It's been an eventful eight years. So eventful, in fact, that I thought it was nine! While the previous seven have already been formally documented, this is my opportunity to chronicle my thoughts on the 2023/24 season...

On the pitch

The story for the men this season was overwhelmingly positive. The 1st XI romped to the East League title, and a welcome return to the EHL, while all but one of the other seven mainstream teams finished in the top five of their respective leagues, including a fantastic third-place finish for the embryonic 8th XI. Both the Veterans and Evergreens teams had challenging but nevertheless enjoyable seasons with a relatively small pool of players.

Sadly, the women's section is going through a difficult period, with significant player turnover particularly at the higher end of the club. Four out of seven teams were relegated, including a second successive relegation for the 1st XI. The one shining light was once again the 6th XI, who followed up last season's Division 6SE league title with third place in Division 5SE.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that the playing fortunes of the club tend to follow the lead of the 1st XIs. I have seen it many times in the last forty-five years. I am sure that the women's teams will bounce back after a period of stability, in much the same way as the men's teams have done in the last few years. For me, the key component for this is players who are committed to playing hockey and taking an active role in off-pitch activities for Chelmsford Hockey Club. Too many players these days appear to view a hockey club simply as a vehicle for their own selfish aims and disappear as soon as things get tough. It always baffles me why so many players in a relegation-threatened team think they are too good to play down a league and seek to play at a higher level. If they were that good their team wouldn't be in trouble! It's particularly sad when it's homegrown players who depart but, hopefully, those who remain have the hockey ability and mental and moral fortitude to weather the storm and are able to enjoy and take pride in rebuilding as the men have done.

Our Junior Section is stronger than ever. The details are covered in Sally Dalton's Junior report but participation levels of over four hundred have increased by circa ten percent on last year. Quality is also high, with several team and individual achievements. The main challenges concern resources – pitch space, coaches, umpires and other volunteers.

I must also mention Sam Prebble's hugely popular Mixed Tournament. Once again, it was enjoyed by many members of all ages, including whole families. It makes a huge statement about how inclusive our club is.

Off the pitch

Several social events, including the Beer Festival, Quiz Night, Gin & Cocktail Night, Men's Dinner, Ladies' Night, Golf Day and an end-of-season lunchtime gathering to celebrate the 125th Anniversary and Peter Hollebon's sixtieth playing season were enjoyed by many, but the undoubted highlight of the year was November's 125th Anniversary Ball which saw two hundred and fifty current and former members reunite for an extremely memorable night. It was particularly gratifying to see that so many people held the club in such high regard that they were prepared to travel huge distances to be there and catch up with old friends. The organisers of all these events are to be thanked and congratulated.

On the facilities front it was another busy year. We have completed the spectator stand refurbishment, installed a new pitch-side kit storage container, CCTV in the changing room block, new wheelie bins on the pitch and made the meeting room a much more welcoming space with the addition of a new trophy cabinet, pictures and whiteboards. The major project for this year will be the LED floodlight upgrade which has been delayed by the need for planning permission.

Challenges

There's really nothing new to say on the challenges facing our club but it's still worth reminding you of some.



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The **behaviour** of members, parents and visitors, both on and off the pitch, is very much under the microscope. We pride ourselves on being an inclusive, family-oriented club able to offer hockey opportunities to all. Expect to hear more on this over the coming months.

The **cost of playing hockey** is always at the forefront of your management committee's minds. We are constantly looking for ways to increase revenue, reduce costs and work more efficiently to ensure it does not become a significant barrier to playing hockey.

Reduced use of the clubhouse and bar, particularly after matches is having a material effect on Sports Club finances and the social fabric of our hockey club. Use it or lose it.

We continue to experience problems with members not **respecting our facilities**. It is the responsibility of all members to ensure that lights and taps are turned off, windows closed, doors locked, floodlights turned off and pitch gates locked.

We are fortunate to have a large and dedicated **volunteer workforce**, but many do too much. Please step forward and offer to help, even if you can't commit to many hours or regular involvement. You never know, you might enjoy it!

We continue to have problems with **local youths gaining access to our pitch and vandalising our facilities**. If you see or hear anything that might help us identify the culprits, please let us know. Photographs of trespassers or those causing damage would also be welcomed.

Vacant roles

There are still a few vacancies next season but generally we are in good shape. Nevertheless, we are constantly seeking volunteers to fill the remaining roles and to help elsewhere. Many hands really do make light work. If you would like to get involved in any way, please speak to a member of the management committee.

The key role to fill this year is **Fixture Secretary**. Most of the work is needed prior to the start of the season. If you like spreadsheets and are well organised it's nothing to be embarrassed about! Please get in touch.

And finally...

Sadly, we lost two Vice-presidents this year - Dick Morris and Hugh Scantlebury. We also belatedly learnt of the deaths of Roley Charlton, Andrew Carruthers, Peter Lake and Life Member, Roger Thompson. All were committed members of the club and will be missed.

I must record the club's thanks to the Chelmer Park ground staff, Martin, Shane, Terry and Alan, who are never anything but helpful and supportive of our activities. My personal thanks too to all volunteers, but particularly the Management Committee members. You all perform your duties, and more, in the best interests of the club and its members with little recognition. Sadly, this year, there have also been instances of personal criticism aimed at club officials, in the main from members who do little or nothing to assist with the running of the club. Despite this, your committee remains diligent and focussed on improving the club for all. Thank you for your hard work and continued support. You have all certainly made my job easier.

It's almost certainly self-indulgent but I would like to conclude on a personal note by thanking the Management Committee for putting my name forward at this AGM for election as a Vice President of the club. It is a great honour and not something I envisaged when I first set foot on the (grass) pitch at Chelmer Park for the 6th XI against Broxbourne in 1979! I can't say that I've enjoyed absolutely every moment of my time with the club, either on or off the pitch, but the lows pale into insignificance when compared with the highs, and certainly make the highs more satisfying and enjoyable. As far as I'm concerned you definitely get out of it what you put in. I look forward to playing an active role in the club for many years to come.

David Kitchiner
June 2024