

Report on Federation Leagues 2021

After a year's absence in 2020 the Federation ran a full season of leagues in both formats. Entries were somewhat down on 2019 in the AC B and U Leagues but largely stable across the GC league competitions.

There were difficulties of course, and I tried to make life a bit easier by keeping travelling distances less than might have been the case, with matches being between nearer neighbouring clubs where possible.

League Winners

I can now confirm the winners of each league:

Association Croquet U-League – Ramsgate. Ramsgate are therefore eligible to enter the Secretary's Shield on our behalf

Association Croquet B-League – Ember

Association Croquet S-League – Reigate Priory

Golf Croquet Level League – Sussex County

Golf Croquet Restricted League – Sussex County

Golf Croquet Handicap East League – Cheam

Golf Croquet Handicap West League – Guildford & Godalming

The best winner of the two handicap leagues represents the Federation in the CA Federation Cup. Both Cheam and Guildford & Godalming had the same number of points but Cheam had a 2% higher percentage of wins so they will be our representatives next season.

A League

The AC A league had some issues this season and as only 25% of games were played I have not awarded the trophy, with the Committee's agreement. I have no doubt this was a one-off related to the difficult year we have had and will not be repeated next season.

Hospitality

One of the issues early in the season was the restriction on offering hospitality to visiting clubs. Everyone had to bring their own food and drink. When the restrictions ended some clubs resumed offering lunch and others did not. The expectation of providing lunch for visitors was raised with me by one of the League Contacts and after some wider discussion I surveyed all League Contacts to see what their opinion was for the future. The result of that survey is attached but in summary, 3 times as many respondents were in favour of not continuing to provide lunch to visiting (and their own by implication) teams than were in favour of maintaining the status quo.

As a result, I am saying as a matter of policy the Federation is not expecting clubs to provide lunch for visiting teams at league matches because that is what the majority of clubs prefer. Clubs are absolutely free to provide lunch, but visitors should not expect it. Hospitality is an important part of inter-club matches and so I want to stress this only

applies to lunches; refreshments on arrival, or tea and cake after a match are appropriate means of expressing hospitality and that has not changed.

From a practical point of view, home teams should make clear when fixing a match if they are offering a meal.

Single-lawn clubs

The other issue where there was some experimentation this season relates to one-lawn clubs. In passing, I have to say I am somewhat surprised that the Federation has arranged some of the leagues in a way that prevents single-lawn clubs from taking part fully by playing home matches at home. The general disruption caused by Covid this season seemed an opportunity for small clubs to experiment with different ways of arranging their home fixtures. As a result quite a lot of matches which would have been played away have been played at home or at both clubs. Towards the end of the season I conducted a survey to collate what happened and it is clear there has been general satisfaction with alternative plans for matches.

I will take this forward next season and in advance of the start will publish on the website a list of the solutions clubs used so they can be taken up by the clubs that were not able to this season.

Short Croquet

There has been renewed interest, particularly from the CA, in promoting Short croquet and as the S League had not developed as much as I would have hoped, I thought it helpful to do some background research on attitudes amongst clubs towards Short croquet.

I surveyed all League Contacts and the summary of that survey is available as an attachment to this report. Briefly there is not much interest at the moment and particularly amongst those clubs which predominantly play Golf Croquet to make it likely this form of the game is going to be easy to introduce. However, there is some interest in an experimental tournament next season and I will do some work on that over the winter. If any club would be interested in hosting such an event, do please let me know.

Finally I would like to thank all the League Contacts for their work in organising the clubs matches this season and hope they will feel able to continue next year. A lot goes into the League Programme and it would not be successful without their commitment.

Attachment: Southeast Federation views on providing lunches at League matches

I sent out an email to all League Contacts raising the issue of providing lunches to the away team at matches. This was suspended during the Covid closure and I believe many if not most clubs did not provide them after restrictions were lifted.

The survey arose because a number of club members involved in organising or playing in league matches had indicated to me that they believed the expectation that a lunch be provided should be dropped. The arguments I heard were:

- * providing lunches at league matches does nothing to help club funds, which is one of the main functions of club catering;
- * is another headache for team captains to organise whilst trying to play their games;
- * where the league lunches are provided by the club volunteer catering team they are often already overburdened.
- * There are important issues to overcome with allergy information, various dietary needs and personal likes and dislikes which require, or ought properly to require, considerable additional communication with the visiting club team;
- * with all concerned bringing their own food, waste is eliminated;
- * lunch breaks tend to be shorter and this allows the visitors to get away in good time, often avoiding the rush hour;
- * an appropriate welcome for visiting players can be made by simply providing refreshments (tea, coffee biscuits etc).

I stressed that providing lunch is not a requirement for playing in the Leagues and the intention here was only to clarify feelings on the expectation to providing one; clubs remained free to do as they wish.

The general tenure of responses

25 responses were received; 8 appeared to be an individual League Contact response (ie, no indication given that there had been wider discussion within the club, though that may have occurred), 14 specifically replied following club or committee discussions. 2 clubs sent two responses (substantially the same information) and 2 were holding responses which did not provide a view; 21 responses remained in the evaluation.

Overall, 14 responses were in favour of ending the expectation; 5 were in favour of keeping the practice of providing lunch and 2 expressed no strong opinion either way.

Of the 'club' responses, 8 were in favour of stopping and 4 in favour of continuing; of the 'individual' responses from League Contacts, 6 were in favour of stopping and 1 in favour of continuing. Again I would caution about drawing too strong a dichotomy between the two groups; the fact that some responses indicated a committee view probably shouldn't be given too much weight as the individual League Contacts are likely to be those members more intimately involved in the arrangements.

In favour of continuing the expectation of lunch provision

The following gives a flavour of the comments made by responses in this group:

- We enjoy doing it We've had so much isolation since the beginning of lockdowns; it is good to get together again and interact with players from other clubs.
- After taking the time and effort, petrol money etc. to play away we feel that tea/coffee and something to eat from the hosting team would be welcome and obviously then can be reciprocated when playing at home. It's nice to all sit together and have a bite to eat.
- we appreciate that there are some clubs where the team does the catering or there are non-volunteer caterers, many of the comments you have received do not apply to us. We do our own catering with the help of very willing volunteers and hope that this can continue.
- I cannot help feeling that it would be a pity if lunches disappeared. At the very least, I think that clubs should be 'strongly encouraged' to provide lunch, even if it is just the French stick and cheeses (with a vegan one of course!). Providing a full cooked lunch might be a struggle for some clubs, but they could get in a tray of sandwiches.
- It would be a shame to end the social aspect of lunches.

In favour of stopping the expectation of lunch provision

The following gives a flavour of the comments made by responses in this group:

- It is easier to ensure I am eating something I like and is an appropriate quantity. Waiting around for all matches to finish before adjourning to lunch is also absorbs time and extends the day. It is possible to convene and sit with our own lunches and enjoy the company of other players.
- As a club with very limited facilities, providing lunch involved a huge amount of organisation and bringing equipment from home. Very happy to provide basic refreshments.
- We agree that it can be a burden to provide lunches. We would support the idea that players bring a packed lunch and eat this together. The home club should provide teas and coffees and biscuits.
- Providing lunches for league matches has become somewhat of a burden to overstretched catering teams. As a club we would prefer to offer hospitality in the form of 'coffee and cake' and feel that this would be acceptable under most circumstances with players providing their own picnic lunch for day long events.
- Gives time for chat afterwards or to play friendly matches against the opposition.

A number of responses noted that it should be down to the individual club whether to provide a meal or not, and that is not in doubt. However the survey does, I think, show that the majority would prefer not to continue doing so and therefore I would propose a statement be added to the website leagues pages indicating this, if the Federation Committee agrees.

John Low

Attachment: Short Croquet Survey Analysis

22 clubs responded to the survey

Q1: Which forms of croquet are played at each club.

Predominantly GC – 13 clubs

Only GC – 3 clubs

Both AC and GC equally – 6 clubs

Predominantly AC – 1 club

Q2: Current practice on lawn division.

Don't divide lawns – 7 (having full-sized lawns) and 1 (half lawn only)

Do divide lawns currently – 12 clubs.

Q3: Of those clubs which did divide a lawn the frequency of this was:

Occasionally for specific events – 8 clubs

Regularly (one or more times a week) – 3 clubs

Permanent division – 1 club

Q4: What type of hoops were used by the clubs which divided a lawn.

Standard hoops – 8 clubs

wire (garden croquet) hoops – 3

Q5: Reasons for not dividing a lawn.

No demand from players – 5 clubs

Too difficult to keep the extra holes – 3 clubs

Dislike of having extra holes – 1 club

not prepared to alter courts - 1 club

Q6: Would the club play in a short croquet league.

Definitely not – 5 clubs

Unlikely – 8 clubs

Probably 5 clubs

Very likely – 2 clubs

Don't know – 3 clubs

Q7: Would the club take part in a trial competition.

Yes – 10 clubs

No – 11 clubs

Q8: Would the club like Federation encouragement to play Short Croquet.

Not really – 9 clubs

Other answers: a wide variety of comments made (see below)

Q9: Demand for coaching.

Unlikely – 12 clubs

Likely – 4 clubs

Don't know – 7 clubs

Looking at those clubs who predominantly or only played GC, three quarters (10 clubs) would definitely not or be unlikely to play in a short croquet league, nor would 8 of that

cohort take part in a trial competition, suggesting their view is already fairly fixed as negatively oriented to the idea of short croquet.

Conclusions

Whilst there is openness on the part of some clubs to try this form of AC and an understanding that AC needs to be encouraged, one might also take the view that for rather a large subset of clubs already without any or with little AC play currently, they are not really interested in looking beyond GC, suggesting a lot of work will be needed to change minds and practice. It is starkly clear how much ground AC has lost to GC among the clubs responding.

There is sufficient interest to warrant a trial competition so the Federation might helpfully work towards that next season.

Free text comments on Federation Support

“The survey leaves a number of points undiscussed. We already participate in the U and B leagues, this is challenging in terms of putting teams together - we are a small club, adding a short croquet league to our competition list would be challenging in terms of putting together a team. Having said that, we are now looking at setting up a short croquet internal competition over the winter as a way of encouraging more members to add AC to their repertoire. If the SECF were to establish a short croquet league it would give players new to AC a chance to compete without the extra challenge of needing very long shots to hit in. We would not want to see the B league fail as a result of any changes to the competition listing. “

“Get a short croquet league going. We can do some hosting “

“We find it difficult to persuade GC players to try any form of AC; getting round this hurdle is a major difficulty. While we welcome the possibility of a league with a different format we are conscious that there is already pressure of use of the lawn and players' time such that it is difficult to raise teams for existing leagues and to find times to play them together with internal club competitions. “

“The majority of our current members would be unlikely to play in a competition with another club. Individual members may take part, but there are only 2 members who have played AC before.”

“Clarify the definition and rules of 'short croquet', e.g. include link to these on CA/SECF website whenever communicating to clubs about it. Also the objectives. Active encouragement of beginners and GC players to play a simpler, quicker version of AC to help stop AC from dying out?”

“Convince the AC players that it is a serious game. We run a short AC and GC croquet tournament with four invited clubs in September. It is a good game especially for the older AC players who are lacking stamina, including, me! “

“Fewer and fewer players are wanting to play AC, but I hope to be able to reverse this trend in future years.”

“We have decided to trial it in the Autumn, following an internal course for new AC players. If it's successful we would join a league. “

“Maybe run a short introductory course on the rules and strategies “

“Could try playing 26pt games time limited to 1.5 hours on a full lawn or a half lawn
Having such a league would certainly provide encouragement. “

“Our AC players have suspended their play at present due to very poor lawn condition. “

Report compiled by John Low