

A year that started much as any other.

At the AGM held on the 9th November 2019 we received the captain's report from Gordon Smith. Hector McLean and Duncan Thomson both past captains were warmly thanked for their time as MLC members and their contributions to many aspects of golf at Craighielaw. John Murdoch and Rodney French were welcomed as new members joining Duncan Mennie, Iain Clarke, Chris Lannin and George McGill and I took over as captain.

The next three months proceeded much as in previous years, with the Winter League, the Turkey Trot and a Xmas collection for the East Lothian Foodbank, a new and successful venture with generous donations from members as well as a full fixture list for 2020 with Summer League, Ladies, Senior and Junior Matches, competitions and events.

The Xmas Turkey Trot had the largest entry ever with 108 members - 53 was the winning score recorded by Barry Sinclair, Rodney French, Craig Davidson, Allan Reoch - there was also a handicap prize, won by Andrew Jones, Clive Gauchan, Andrew Whitelaw and Alan Grieve.

Members had enjoyed fine Festive fare - always a nice time of year in the members lounge and even mince pies on the course at the Turkey Trot. Gabrielle McDonald was on hand to do the presentations.

The winter foursomes was won by Rodney French and Barry Sinclair but there was no Medal Winners Day played on the 21st March to receive their trophy, along with the 2019-20 trophy and medal winners - the first casualty of coronavirus, soon to be followed by the April Shotgun.

Protocols were already in place to continue playing golf but that was not to be when the country went into lockdown on Monday 23rd March.

All employees were sent home with only Derek, Jonathan and Jennifer, on reception, on hand to close the business down and deal with cancellations and rescheduling, green staff and supplies and securing the building - the early unknown days of lockdown.

At the point of the initial lockdown in March the club was in the final stages of finishing off its membership renewal for the year. Given the uncertainty surrounding lockdown, the club extended the date by which subs were due to be paid. It was pleasing to see that the majority of members paid their subscriptions which allowed the club to carry out essential course maintenance through the lockdown period. In the early stages of the lockdown the club also allowed a few new applicants to join which filled our membership categories and I am pleased to say that the club now has a full membership with a small waiting list. We aim to run with around 200 full members, we are currently at 203 and 150 5 day members, we are currently at 151.

With nine weeks of full lockdown some members asked if there would be any recompense for this lost playing time. The club have agreed that there will be some form of reward, credit or refund but as things remain uncertain in relation to another lockdown the club will look to address this either at the next renewal or earlier should there be clear signs that we will not be locked down again.

Members received the first of the monthly and phased updates at the end of March - these can be found on the MLC website page. These documents were timeous and comprehensive and kept members full informed - many thanks to Derek.

With the government furlough scheme for employees and support for businesses, the help that the Wemyss and March Estate provided and continues to provide and the support of the membership, Craighielaw did get through those next months of lockdown until golf returned on the 29th May.

Derek and Jonathan shared furlough, the small green staff team worked amazingly on the course - and through these last months of large playing numbers still maintain Craigiellaw as a great course to play and just a reminder - who knows when we'll ever rake a bunker again but we can replace divots and repair pitch marks!

Craig returned to the pro shop, or at least the window. We all signed in, firstly as twos, some not, as observing the five mile rule, then threes, fours, a seated area and also refreshments. Cameron followed soon after, just a brilliant job - many thanks to Jonathan and his team.

Since the 29th May, rounds of golf played by members are up an astonishing 75% which has been great to see but obviously does put pressure on the course and green staff and the booking system.

And then in mid August the clubhouse opened and we were able to welcome back Ann and John and their team, and the hotel cleaning team to ensure all cleaning and hygiene protocols were followed. Members enjoyed the Eat Out to Help Out scheme and as the business began to build again and the Job Retention scheme was about to end it was hoped that staff might return to more normal working hours but this was not to be when the hospitality industry was shut down again. The argument in favour of keeping clubhouses open was not successful.

And as I write East Lothian has moved into Tier 3 and the clubhouse is open again, with a review though planned next week and talk of putting a travel ban into law.

So it's difficult if not impossible to know what's ahead but we do plan to go ahead with a fixture list over the next months to include a Winter Fourball competition, a Xmas Turkey Trot and optional medals through till March, ending this part of the season with the Medal Winners Day which will include winners from 2019-20 and the smaller number from 2020-21.

There's a Xmas menu to look forward to and importantly in 2021, Craigiellaw Golf Club will be twenty years old. We hope so much to be able to hold lots of events and competitions to celebrate with members past and present, with other clubs and with the Wemyss and March estate who had the foresight to commission a golf club at Craigiellaw. It's planned to open the hotel with its fine new extension early in the year - Shirley has been spotted behind the reception desk dealing with forward bookings.

Competitions did return, including the Club Championship, the Junior Club Championship and optional medals and the Winter League team is back playing again. There was also junior coaching and many of the groups were able to pick up on their own competitions. But we lost a number of club events and competitions, as well as planned major fixtures. It was especially sad that the US Kids Championship had to be postponed till 2021.

The Club Championship which should have been played in June was played in late August - not a great week of weather and a number of ties were completed in almost darkness. Many thanks to all who competed, including two juniors, Ryan Yuill and Magnus Braby and one of our girl members Carys Irvine, along with some four new members. The A Championship was won by Kenny Glen, defeating Craig Davidson six and five, and the B by Dean White defeating John Howie by one hole.

Magnus won the Junior Club Championship played on 19th October by one stroke with Alexander Yuill in second place. This same week of the mid term holiday, Craig and Cameron ran a successful junior coaching week.

Gordon Smith who looks after the junior programme reports that much of the junior season was lost, despite the best efforts of Dave Warren, the junior league secretary, no league matches were played this year. Craigiellaw played in the County Cup beating Royal Musselburgh but losing to Gullane by one hole in the quarterfinal. The team also played in the East Lothian stroke play competition but finished a poor 6th in an entry of 9 teams.

Gregor Thompson had a notable win at Royal Dornoch winning best handicap in atrocious conditions

Like all other teams, the juniors hope that a competitive season returns next year and gives the juniors something to get their teeth into!

One final note - Lewis Irvine has finished his stint as a junior player at Craighielaw. He has captained the team for the past 4 years winning the league twice - he has represented the juniors for 8 years and has been a great asset to the juniors and the club - we wish him well for the future.

The European Tour and the Ladies European Tour were equally affected by coronavirus with events both cancelled and postponed. When events were played this season Gabrielle McDonald and Grant Forrest, our two professional members did play again, though travelling and competing was very different with so many coronavirus constraints. Grant lies 64th in the Race to Dubai and Gabrielle, finishing in a great third place at the Czech Ladies Challenge finished 13th in the LETAS Order of Merit

A small number of members, with John Murdoch as team marshal worked at the Ladies Scottish Open and Scottish Open at the Renaissance - strange events with no spectators and daily coronavirus health checks.

Meantime Jonathan has worked over the last months to prepare the club and members for the introduction of the World Handicapping System on the 2nd November. A comprehensive note was sent out to members mid October and with the system up and running, members should have been able to access their updated handicaps this week. Jonathan reports a number of teething problems and is working with members to resolve anomalies.

In September Brian McKendrick asked to step down as head greenkeeper. Brian has been with the club since the building of the course and head greenkeeper for the last seven years - working with Jonathan, Craighielaw has developed into a great golf course, challenging but fair for all levels of golfers. The recruitment process is in progress with the first of interviews this week, with a very strong application list from clubs across the country and abroad. Meantime assistant greenkeeper Kieran Moffat has taken temporary charge.

Membership of the Members Liaison Committee will remain as it is. Gordon Smith will step down as past captain, stay on the committee and continue to look after the junior membership and John Murdoch will take on the role of vice-captain. My thanks to all committee members for their contributions to all matters at Craighielaw even if we have not been able to sit round a table since February and meet.

My thanks to Derek who has had to deal with everything that has come across his desk from lockdown, to furlough, to phases and tiers and much more - we are lucky to have such a unflappable and approachable club manager.

My thanks also to Jonathan, who's management of our golf course along with the greenkeeping staff means that Craighielaw, even with the large playing numbers is in great condition ahead of the winter season - and I'm sure he'll be pleased that all things WHS are now in hand!

The pro shop have been brilliant, our thanks to Craig and Cameron and it's good now to have Steve back.

Ann and John have had much to deal with in terms of the rules around the provision of hospitality, including the opening, the closure and the opening again of facilities and all the associated protocols - the staff have responded so positively and pleasantly to all these demands.

And finally our thoughts are with all those challenged through these long months of lockdown and various phases since and also with the families of those members we have lost this last year.

Like all of us I hope for some intervention with respect to COVID 19 that allows everyday life and golf at Craigelaw to return to some semblance of what it once was - I look forward to enjoying a more normal year as your club captain.

Evlyn Raistrick