

## Jacky Murray Memorial 7s – Wellingborough – 6/7 April 2024

As the baby member of the team, it has fallen to me to write the report!

10 teams (7 x Ladies, 2 x Kettering Academy & the LX Men) gathered for this now annual festival (not a tournament as there were no prizes) split into 2 groups of 5 playing a round-robin on the Saturday to decide the groupings for Sunday.



Back L-R Bill Greenwood (BG) Tony Mastroddi (TM) Chris `Bollig (CB) Brian Woolcott (BW) Jon Dakin (JD) Tony Taig (TT)

Front L-R Tony Neeve (Captain) (TN) Steve (Guest GK) Mike Rushmere (MR) Pete Willis (PW)

After the customary/necessary introductions we tried to workout TNs squad rotations and after a quick reshuffle came up with 3 workable groups of 3 (Backs BG/CB PW, Mids JD/MR/TN, Fwds BW/TM/TT) allowing 2 from each group on the pitch at the same time. Heavy stuff for that early on a Saturday.

First up were Alliance and as always happens with these things it takes time for players to get used to each other (put it on BWs stick please not 2 yards in front of him!), PLUS the rotations, so it wasn't fluent but it was open and we did eventually score through TMs now traditional reverse stick. MR then ran the ball, unchallenged, into the D, took aim and hit it cleanly, exactly where he aimed it, except he aimed 3 feet wide of the post. A 1 – 0 victory.

Next up Wales O65s (with a squad of about 15) and with the rust gone from both teams some good hockey was played with our movement on and off the ball much improved. The Welsh keeper had a good game but couldn't us out forever and a goal each for TM and TT meant we won 2 – 0.

LX Ladies White got the brunt of our ever-improving play. With goals from TN, TM, JD (finally a non-Tony) and finally a show-off reverse-stick flick across the keeper, at height, for TM (who else!) meant it finished 4 – 0. Fair play to the LX ladies who kept attacking throughout and finished the game with a couple of short corners of their own.

Finally for the day were the keeperless Kettering youngsters (with a couple of adults helping/coaching). It was a good game, slightly quicker paced than the others but they soon discovered you can't dribble past experienced defenders and when they did pass it round they won some short-corners and even got a goal (Milly, I believe) but TM had scored 2 by then (reverse stick ?) for a 2 – 1 victory.

A trip to Kettering Sports Club in the evening for a memorial dinner was well received, as were the 4 raffle prizes (star prize for BW!) for the team (3 were alcoholic so even better).

The Saturday results meant we were in the top group for Sunday and would face 3 new teams, but first up were Wales O65s, who were out for revenge and were really up for this, unfortunately we weren't. With a 4-man defence and 2 high forwards we gifted them the midfield and they pressed hard. Eventually we adjusted our shape, rotations work, and TN opened the scoring, however the Welsh continued their pressing and were rewarded with a well-deserved equaliser. We won a short-corner at the death but by the time the umpire blew for the offence the other umpire had blown for full-time so, correctly, it wasn't awarded. An honourable 1 – 1 draw that the Welsh loved and one we got away with.

Up next Oddbods (Bedford based (ish)) who looked good in their previous game (it was also Steve, our guest keeper, facing off against his wife, their keeper). However, the flowing hockey we missed in the Welsh game returned and we scored 4 without reply. Goals for TN and another 2 for TM were overshadowed by our second goal when BW carried the ball into the D, with his distinctive gait, took aim and smashed it into the bottom right hand corner AND ALL ON HIS 87<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY.

Kettering Academy A team, won all their games on Saturday, but like us started Sunday with a draw were next and they had some quick, skilful players so we had to ready and we were. Good hockey from both teams throughout but experience told, helped by the occasional swing and miss from the youngsters, and a goal apiece for TN and TM settled it.

Last up LX Ladies Blue. We opened the scoring after a lovely passing move finished off by TN only to immediately concede an equaliser after a speculative long pass found their only forward, unmarked and duly punished. Just like the Welsh game we won a short-corner which was awarded before the final whistle and TM converted it with a nice flick to seal it 2 – 1.

An enjoyable weekend, with no rain (wind, yes, but no rain) and a plentiful supply of free suedes and carrots. I asked the captain for a sentence or two about the weekend (apologies for the length!):

What a great successful team performance where everyone supported each other and the skipper's plans for the tournament which were to enjoy the hockey, friendships and, as the only all Men's team playing, ensure that LX was seen in a positive light. And I'm pleased to say I believe we achieved everything I had hoped for. The team also managed themselves for rotations, didn't complain when I opted to include Isaiah (an eight-year-old boy!) in the team for a couple of games which produced the wonderful spectacle of an 8 to almost 88 age range playing at the same time. The icing on the cake for the weekend was undoubtedly on the Sunday when the birthday boy, Brian Woolcott a mere 87 years young, struck a perfect shot to score against the Oddbods.