

Sussex Under 14 Team on a French Adventure

On the last weekend of the recent half-term, a team from Sussex under 14 girls and boys travelled to Dieppe in Normandy to take part in the inaugural M15 Cup staged by the Golf Federation of Haute Normandie. It was a great experience for the six players and the accompanying Team Manager and parents quite enjoyed it as well! The team of 2 girls and 4 boys - Lizzie Price (The Nevill), Maddy Man (Haywards Heath), Thomas Thurloway (Ifield), Gregor Macintosh (Manning's Heath), Laird Shepherd (Dale Hill) and Hamish Mardell (Cooden Beach)-represented Sussex well on a very tough course against some very tough opposition. There were 6 other teams – Kent, Haute Normandie, Basse Normandie, Paris, Pas de Calais and Picardie – and each team had players with very low handicaps although the competition was played off scratch.

The tournament took place over two days with an 18 hole stroke-play round each day. The team score each day was made up of the best 5 individual scores which then provided the 2 day aggregate to determine the overall winners. There were also prizes for the three best individual totals over the two rounds for girls and boys.

Friday was a marvellous, sunny and wind free day which was just as well because the course was set up with difficult pin positions and very quick greens. No player really escaped without some poor scores on individual holes. The Par 4 5th hole became a graveyard for many players with scores in double figures not uncommon. One Sussex player managed a green in regulation only to six-putt and he was by no means the worst! Despite the difficult set up of the course, some players were able to put in quality rounds of golf although against a par of 70, only 5 players managed to break 80. The best score of 72 was by the French Under 14 Girl champion (from Paris) and her handicap was 1! The best rounds by Sussex were from Thomas Thurloway and Gregor Macintosh who both turned in solid rounds of 82. At the end of the first day, Sussex lay in 4th place behind the leaders Paris. Kent, who had a team of very low handicap boys could only manage 3rd position.

Saturday was an early start, delayed by 10 minutes so it could become daylight! The weather was not quite so pleasant but golfing conditions were still good. Pin positions were more friendly but a challenging breeze and damp greens meant the test was still going to be tough. The scoring was expectedly better, with 10 players breaking 80, including Sussex's Thomas Thurloway with a fine 76 (after being 6 over par through 4 holes!) The excellent French girl followed up her 72 with a 71 which spearheaded Paris to an overwhelming team win. Gregor Macintosh put in another excellent 82 and Laird Shepherd a fighting 83 which could have been much better but for a disappointing (for him) double bogey on the last hole. Lizzie fought her way round and finished in a blaze of glory with pars on her last three holes to finish with a 90. Maddy Man and Hamish Mardell suffering from some poor health were not able to produce their best but their competitive spirit was strong and their desire to do well for the team was not diminished by being unwell.

At the end of the day, the team slipped to 5th despite an improvement by 8 shots on the team score from Friday which was a creditable performance from a team who never gave up. Kent finished 3rd just behind Pas de Calais who were 10 shots behind the winners Paris.

The experience of playing in a different environment against girls and boys from other countries was marvellous and all helps in developing the County's young golfers. All the six players were magnificently behaved and a credit to their accompanying parents and to the County and will have learnt much about themselves as well.

Haute Normandie Golfe are to be congratulated for their hospitality and a well organised tournament and Dieppe Golf Club too could not have been more welcoming. A repeat for 2012 has already been announced and Sussex will be very welcome to return.

Ian Jaggard

Team Manager