

Chairman's AGM Report, 2021

The 2021 season has been one of triumph, not only on the field, but behind the scenes as well. Unfortunately the celebrations were tempered with the passing of our President, Barry Peay, who despite being very poorly, was extremely proud of the teams' achievements.

The obvious success was that our Men's 1st X1 got promoted back to the Premier League at the first time of asking with the 2nd team also having a good season, but sadly just missing out on promotion into Division 4.

The general atmosphere in and around the Club was probably the main catalyst for the success. The seeds were sewn during the COVID induced half season of 2020 when we competed for the August Cup, but we continued the positive feel into this year.

Following the shock relegations of all teams in 2019, we obviously had to bounce back quickly and with careful planning from the captains and newly appointed Cricket Manager, Ben Williams (Gilo), went about restoring our place in the top flight.

Our Women's team had a steady year finishing 4th in the League with Izzy Noakes again having a great season ending just one away from 200 Horsham wickets. Without wanting to take away anything from the playing side, reports from the captains will be made available separately.

We held our bi-annual matches with the MCC Men's & Women's teams with mixed fortunes, the lads winning their high scoring game with the girls not so lucky. The season finale was a game against a touring Barbados team who not only brought the weather, but typical Caribbean food, music and their unique brand of cricket too. From simply just another game the event took on a life of its own and the match was played in front of throngs of spectators who decided to visit the Cricketfield Road sunshine. As it happened a host of ex-International players including 'Big Bird' Joel Garner, Monte Lynch and Neal Radford also turned up to watch the Barbados team posting 161 in their 25 overs with the home side knocking off the runs in just 22 overs.

Getting promoted back into the Premier League is a huge achievement, but our focus must now be on staying there. I don't think that anyone can argue that it will be difficult and we must therefore improve our playing strength as well as getting more individuals involved in managing the Club. For far too long the Club has relied on the few to do most of the work, and this must change.

We have been looking at the restructuring of the Management Committee which reduces the amount of people who have to attend management meetings, but creates a number of sub-committees with specific responsibilities such as finance, admin and team selection. These Sub-committees will be chaired by a Management Committee member, but will be free to carry out their respective roles as they see fit. The important thing is to get more people involved in the running of the Club with anyone serving on a committee having a specific role to play.

You will notice from the attached Agenda, amendments to the Constitution will need to be made in order for the restructure to be agreed. It shows how the Management Committee will look with a new position included, that of Cricket Development Manager. We consider the role as vital in how the Club develops and the person your committee recommends comes with an impressive pedigree.

Another advantage of a restructure is that we will be able to retain the services of our Treasurer, Colin Mitcham. For far too long Mitch has been doing more and more jobs unconnected with the finances, but by involving other people in roles such as managing the Play Cricket Website, Club Development plan and the complexities of employing an overseas player should we decide to go down this route. As Mitch is generally front and centre of most things that go on within the Club, we can ill afford to lose someone of his calibre.

Your committee along with Anniversary organiser, Howard Cohen, decided to suspend the 250th celebrations until next year when we will be holding a range of events, dinners and fixtures details of which will be published in the course of time. Hepworth's Brewery will be making a range of Sestersential ales which will be available throughout the year and we also commissioned a portrait of the ground by local artist, Paul Talbot. We have Anniversary prints of the ground and these are still available from Colin Mitcham via the Club Office. The souvenir brochure is in the final stages of preparation with some fantastic articles and memories from a range of contributors and will include a foreword by John Barclay.

So what can we expect looking forward to next year?

Well the Club will be managed by almost a totally new set of personnel. We will have a new President, Chairman, a new post in Cricket Development Manager (CDM) and three new Captains. The current Field Officers have all decided that for family reasons they wish to hand over the reins to someone else and these will be selected by the new committee at its first meeting after the AGM.

The newly appointed CDM will be responsible for all Men's cricket including our blossoming junior section, recruitment and training where we have already retained the services of a current first class player for next season to act as head coach.

We are delighted that Gardner & Scardifield are continuing their sponsorship for another three years and we have nearly agreed a deal with a local business whose company logo will appear on our training shirts.

Despite COVID restrictions being gradually relaxed, the Club still had its challenges with maintaining the normal cricketing schedule. Things like changing, teas and providing the necessary sanitising protocols all took its toll. Fortunately our Fixtures Secretary and Sports Club Bar Manager, Chris 'Shaka' Shambrook, masterminded this minefield with great skill which also indirectly contributed on how the teams performed on the field.

In order for the Sports Club to survive the ravages of COVID, the Cricket section had to relinquish a part of the outfield in order to accommodate the beer garden which through the summer was generally packed to the rafters with people enjoying a tippie in the sunshine. It has to be said that such was the success of this initiative the beer garden will continue in some shape or other into next year. This will mean that we will have to rethink how the pitches are allocated as four wickets on the pavilion side are unsuitable for adult league cricket due to the smaller boundary, an issue for the ground staff to overcome.

I had hoped to announce that the Sports Club had retained the services of a new groundsman, but unfortunately the person we selected decided to stay where he was. We have placed an advertisement in the trade press and hope that we can get a suitable candidate in time for the new

season. In the meantime the ever dependable Lawrence Gosling will continue to keep his eye on the place until the vacancy is filled.

As part of the 250th celebrations we are planning many high profile fixtures and hope that Sussex can be part of the festivities, possibly with a Royal London 50 over game, the competition normally runs in July and August and negotiations are ongoing.

I genuinely believe that the Town is crying out for Sussex to make a return to Cricketfield Road and sincerely hope that our discussions will bear fruit. Wouldn't it be fantastic to see many of our home grown players turning out on the town's ground in county colours, with the possibility of Tom Haines leading the team out as he did throughout last season. Quite why Tom was overlooked for higher honours within the game is beyond me. We could also see the other Horsham Tom, Clark, also make an appearance after an injury frustrating 2021, and also Will Beer a veteran of the white ball game.

One thing that I can promise is that the scoreboard on the main ground is to receive an upgrade with LED lights replacing the existing fascia thanks to a very generous donation from a member. Many will have been frustrated with the lack of clarity showing accurate scores, but now hopefully this will be a thing of the past.

Any Club cannot survive without its volunteers. I've already mentioned Mitch who has been an absolute godsend to you and me as have the girls in the office, Polly, Clare and Lorraine who regularly dealt with any admin jobs that got shoved their way, but always with a smile. Our thanks also must go to the umpires and scorers who were few and far between this year, a problem the new committee need to overcome. Finally a vote of thanks must go to Gilo whose enthusiasm on and off the field was another major reason for the turn round in our fortunes, pushing important things like net practice and general availability to the forefront. Everybody responded to his cajoling and as a result the club benefited with promotion.

I am very optimistic and excited about 2022 and really hope that we can continue with the good progress made in the last couple of years, and to make the 250th anniversary celebrations something very special and proud of.

Richard Marshall