

SOUTH WESTERN COUNTIES GOLF ASSOCIATION

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MIDLAND GOLF UNION LIMITED

Saunton Golf Club

17th October 2009

MATCH REPORT

Those who arrived at Saunton Golf Club with some time to spare ahead of the annual SWCGA fixture with the Midlands (Sat Oct 17) were treated to a quite fantastic spectacle as the early morning mist hovered above the remarkable dunescape that comprises surely one of the UK's finest 36 hole links golf facilities. With the weather set fair – players on both sides had enjoyed similar conditions for practice on Friday – the omens were good for a match that promised to deliver some high-quality golf.

Finding himself in the rare (if not unique) position of having all 10 of his original selections available for the match, SWCGA captain Richard Simmons had no hesitation in sending out the Devon pairing of England Elite Squad player Billy Hemstock alongside current Devon Order of Merit winner James Dimond in the top foursomes. Local knowledge is worth at least a couple of holes at a course that often teases and tempts players to go for pins they really should leave well alone, and the home side produced solid golf to run out 3&2 winners over Rhys Black and the ever-vocal and entertaining Jarred McNight.

That advantage was short lived, however, as the formidable pairing of David Coupland and Ryan Evans immediately hit back for the Midlands with a victory by the same margin over the reigning South West individual champion Phil White and partner Billy Downing.

The name 'Chris Lloyd' has been prominent of late in the world of amateur golf, the 17-year-old Bristolian capping a memorable season with an impressive victory in the English County Champions tournament at Woodhall Spa in September. Lloyd, who was also a member of the victorious England Boys Home International and Jacques Leglise teams paired up with long-standing Gloucester player Nick Day to grind out a 1-hole win over Dave Elliott and Ross Overton, the Midlands pair unlucky to find a tough lie in the greenside bunker at the 18th.

That was as far as the good news went for the South West as the Midlands then took charge of the morning session with James Burnett and Levi Desmond proving too much of a handful for the Wiltshire pairing of Miles Mackman and Matt Swales. The lunchtime scoreline was then confirmed at 3-2 in the Midland's favour as Kevin Garwood and Ben Loughrey saw their efforts undone at the final hole where, after finding a fairway trap off the tee, they could only watch as John Chamberlain and Fred Dewsbury celebrated holing an unlikely 30-footer down the slope to steal the point with a four.

With the match delicately poised, Devon's Billy Hemstock was again charged with leading the way for the home side, and while the plus-3 player from Teignmouth has enjoyed a terrific season – the highlight being a third place finish in the recent European Amateur Championship – he was always up against it in his match with Ross Overton, the Nottinghamshire player clearly in no mood to surrender a remarkable consecutive 28-game winning streak in singles appearances for his county. As Hemstock would later admit, costly mistakes over the opening five holes saw him fall three behind, and although he then settled into his game, playing the next 17 holes in four under par, his figures were matched by Overton who ran out a worthy winner by 3&1. Record intact.

Chris Lloyd levelled the afternoon session with a solid performance against the talented Jarred McKnight, birdies at the tough 16th and 17th holes securing a 100% record on what was his debut appearance for the South West. After shaking hands, McKnight asked Lloyd what he had planned golf-wise for the rest of the season: "Well, I'm off to Houston next week and then I go to Abu Dhabi for a couple of weeks training, then Spain and hopefully South Africa in the New Year" came the matter-of-fact reply. It's tough at the top!

Back in the real world, Somerset's Phil White found himself up against a hot putter as Dave Coupland carried on where he had left off in the morning foursomes, taking advantage of Saunton's superb greens to chalk up a victory by 3&2. However, the pendulum would swing back in the South West's favour in game 4, as the former Lagonda Trophy winner and England player Miles Mackman produced a typically measured performance to seal a 2 hole victory over Rhys Black.

At two apiece in the singles, speculation was now rife as to how the remaining ties would unfold, and with game's changing so quickly it was often too close to call. A quick glance down the scoresheet revealed things were going to be very tight right the way down the order: Wiltshire's Kevin Garwood (a member of the British Universities side to have put one over the Midlands earlier in the year) was firmly in control of his match at No 8, with John Chamberlain, a game the Bournemouth player would eventually win comfortably 4&3. Playing immediately ahead of him, Devon's James Dimond had raced to a comfortable lead after seven holes over Levi Desmond, and though he was pegged back his efforts rewarded him with another valuable point. For Wiltshire's Matt Swales, however, a farewell singles performance as an amateur would result in a disappointing 3&2 defeat at the hands of David Elliott – though he went out in some style courtesy of a spectacular socket rocket when attempting a 'Mickelson' at the 15th.

And so, as the sun dipped on what had been a glorious day's play over the East Course, what would be regarded as the critical point for the South West came courtesy of Wiltshire's Ben Loughrey, for most of the afternoon apparently out of sorts, but who turned his match around over the closing three holes to secure a 1-up victory at the 18th over James Burnett. It was a fighting performance matched by Cornwall's 17-year-old Billy Downing, who also found himself one down with three to play before levelling his match with Ryan Evans at the 17th and then shaking hands on a half in front of the clubhouse moments later.

Dowling's half-point took the South West's tally to 7.5, whereupon all eyes were on the anchor match featuring Gloucester's stalwart, Nick Day, and the Midlands' Fred Dewsbury. One down arriving in the middle of the 15th fairway, the Gloucester player uncharacteristically squandered his chances to level matters when his opponent lost a ball, and would live to rue taking three putts at the 17th to lose 2 down.

Having trailed 3-2 after the morning foursomes session, South West captain Richard Simmons was delighted with the way his team rallied to edge the singles and secure a tie. "At this level, any time you can take the initiative in the singles you generally get a result, and after losing by a margin last year this was a terrific performance by the South West team. We have enjoyed rare playing conditions on one of the world's finest championship links golf courses – and it doesn't get any better than that."

RICHARD SIMMONS
CAPTAIN
SWCGA