

WESTERN WILDCATS HOCKEY CLUB

Founded 1898 and Celebrating 120 years of Success, Failure and lots in between

FRIENDS OF WESTERN NEWSLETTER July 2018

When the curtain came down on season 2017-18 - the 120th in the club's honourable history - there was much to admire. But on the playing side maybe a b+ would be appropriate. Three players have been added to the internationalists board, and three represented Scotland at the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast. The junior section continues to provide a supply of talented players with potential for the future, with healthy representation in national age group squads. In our main feature outgoing president Alastair Scott provides his take on the current state of things.

Season's Report Card (shamelessly plagiarised from the President's report to the AGM)

Men's 1sts: an up-and-down season which ended with them in fourth place. They lost 2-3 to Grange in a thrilling play-off semi-final for European places and were unlucky to do so. Cup exit at the hands of Edinburgh University at Auchenhowie in the semi-final was disappointing. This aside, the strong finish to the season suggests good things for next year. Rob Harwood's promotion to the Scotland squad underlined the progress so many younger players are making.

The squad is still a youthful one, but the reliance on Andrew McConnell and Rob Harwood is reflected in the 'goals for' column. More regular contributions from the others around them will be vital if they are to make a meaningful title challenge next season.

Women's 1sts: another good year in which the girls finished fifth. They looked good for fourth but lost out on goal difference on the last day of the season, following some indifferent results when Becky Ward and Kaz Cuthbert were away at the Commonwealth Games. This encapsulates their season, the significant factor being a failure to convert chances when dominating play. Having disposed of Clydesdale Western in an earlier round of the Scottish Cup via penalty strokes, they fell at the semi-final stage to Grove Menzieshill by the same method. But they get stronger year on year and if they capitalise more from good forward play they will be a match for any team.

Men's 2nds: Finished eighth in Central Division I. A difficult season where their very able youngsters struggled when a few more experienced players would have been invaluable. A strong finish in the league makes us hopeful that with added maturity next season will be more rewarding.

Women's 2nds: A fantastic season which saw the girls - newly promoted to West Division 1 - being crowned District Champions.

Men's 3rds: A fair-to-middling season with a mid-table finish. Again, lack of consistency in selection and problems in finding a goalkeeper were sources of much frustration.

Women's 3rds: A great team spirit and never-say-die ethos from a very inexperienced group. Expect a few more good results next year.

Men's 4ths: Latterly the 5ths, but the demise of one of our West 1 teams meant they became the 4ths. Not the easiest of seasons. They eventually finished last, but this was partly due to points being docked for admin failures. Should survive in Division 3 next season as a result of league reconstruction.

International Corner

Danie McMurray won her first cap in goal for Scotland against Ireland last October alongside teammates Kareena Cuthbert and Becky Ward, and becomes the club's 10th goalkeeper to gain international recognition.

Congratulations to Catriona Booth and Emma McDiarmid who made their international debuts with Scotland's indoor women's squad in Brussels in January, reflecting their recent progress. Gavin Sommerville, retired from the national outdoor squad, was called up to the men's indoor team for a European C Division tournament in Cyprus.

Rob Harwood, whose talents were obvious at an early age and had represented Scotland at all levels up to under-21, finally got his chance with the full squad in Malaga in January. In his first match, against the USA, he scored early with an audacious lob over the keeper in a 3-1 win. Rob sustained this form to seal his place in the Commonwealth Games squad, where his performances were much praised.

Finally, Ian Moodie's caps record has been updated on the honours board - 42 caps gained between 2012 and 2014, scoring 9 goals. He claims these were from an average of 9 yards, but methinks he might be confusing average with aggregate. Super fit, highly skilful and very brave, he deserved every honour which came his way.

Some Thoughts from a Recently Vacated Chair

Alastair Scott's reflections on his time as President of Western Wildcats H.C.

When I began pulling a new committee together in late 2012 it was very clear that we inherited some enormous advantages: a first class playing facility, sound finances (albeit carrying debt as a result of the new pitch), a burgeoning junior section, strong structures and a membership which was very supportive of the club and contained a well of talent on which to hopefully draw. Essentially, the foundations put in place under the outstanding leadership of Roger Jamieson and Stuart Dick were very solid.

That said, there were obvious issues. To quote the editor of this august publication, we had become "less a hockey club and more a raising-money-for-a-hockey-pitch club". This wasn't meant as a criticism. Rather, the existential need to lay the new pitch had consumed so much administrative bandwidth that other areas, principally playing and performance, had by necessity been given less emphasis. We had a men's 1st Team filled with excellent players who were coming to the end of their careers and a Women's 1st Team struggling to establish themselves in Division 1. Our junior section was beginning to produce some very exciting young talent but these boys and girls were still some way off making an impact in their respective first teams.

So the potential was massive but the challenges were daunting. My first principle had something of the Hippocratic Oath about it: first, do no harm - let's not be the guys who break Western. I was very aware of how much work had been done over the previous decade to get the club into the healthy financial position we now enjoyed and how quickly this could be squandered by irresponsible leadership. Director of Hockey Kris Kane brought the second major theme. He was insistent from the very start that we needed a laser focus on excellence in coaching. To achieve those two aims we made three appointments which have proved, with the benefit of hindsight, to be three of the best decisions we ever took.

First of all we asked Vishal Marwaha to take over the Director of Business role. Vish's contribution to our club over several decades as a player, coach and now administrator (he has just succeeded me as President) is astonishing. Within four years we had paid off the debt on the pitch and were in a position to invest in major improvements to the facilities, in addition to managing a big increase in outgoings to our coaching staff. What I particularly admire about Vish is the fact that not only does he manage the finances efficiently, he is a hockey guy and sees the value in spending money on the right things.

Second, on the advice of Murray Laing, we brought in Kaz Marshall (now Cuthbert) as women's Player-Coach. Captain of Scotland and a huge personality, not only did we get a great coach and a top class player but, crucially, her own uncompromising demand for the highest standards. Kaz also brought us credibility as a destination for ambitious, talented players. In her time with the club the women's 1sts have gone from a team yo-yo-ing between the top two divisions to one that is disappointed not to make the European play-offs. Her enthusiasm and energy are boundless and her contribution is immeasurable.

Finally, we brought Harry Dunlop back for his third spell in charge of the men's 1st Team. Harry and assistant James Moran were the perfect people to perform the high-wire act of integrating the glut of outstanding youngsters to the 1sts while maintaining competitiveness. That they did this without once finishing outside the top four is a remarkable achievement and the men's 1sts are as well placed as they have been in years going into a new season. Like Kaz the value for money we get from Harry and James are inestimable and both are totally invested in Western.

To continue to address the need for stronger coaching we formalised Euan Miller's role and made a commitment to developing our junior coaches. Euan takes a great deal of credit for much of the work done with our juniors, especially the performance ethos developed with the boys. A high percentage of the players in the men's 1sts now were coached by him. We are also very fortunate to have volunteers of the calibre of Debs O'Toole supporting the juniors. Rona Stewart's contribution as Women's Director of Hockey has also been crucial to the development of the Women's section.

For all that the progress made on the playing side has been very positive, my reports at each AGM that we were 'improving but still in a period of transition' were delivered with an annual increase in exasperation. The thing we are missing is silverware of serious note. I think that this season will be a very exciting one and believe that this could very well be the year that we break our duck. Here's hoping.

I've dwelt in the main on the big ticket issues. It's probably worth pointing out, though, that the day-to-day running of a hockey club takes up a hell of a lot of energy in itself. Getting teams out, sourcing umpires, umpiring, covering coaching sessions,

coaching (often unpaid and on a Sunday morning) paying bills, chasing invoices, dealing with the crises that are as unpredictable as they are inevitable, working with Milngavie and Bearsden Sports Club, West District Hockey and Scottish Hockey (and doing so in a positive, engaged way) as well as organising dinners, dances, socials and mucking in to make sure the bar is open, the pitch is tidy, the hot water is on in the showers and the floodlights are switched off at the end of the day all need to be done by *somebody*. This club is extraordinarily fortunate that we have so many decent people who ensure these jobs are not just done but done very well.



Something we take real pride in at Western is our history and traditions. Here, the partnership with Friends of Western has been one of the most positive developments of recent years and something in which I take particular satisfaction. In contributing the club flag, Norman McLeod memorial clock, internationalists boards (to which seven new faces have been added during my tenure - a statistic I simply do not possess the Trump-level chutzpah to take any credit for), the Bill Matheson memorial bench, numerous new trophies and much more, Friends of Western has added a very specific kind of value. The club proper will always spend time wrestling with the more immediate priorities and so the support of FOW gives us something invaluable and unique.

Vishal certainly inherits a club in an enviable position. The next step is win trophies and I am certain that it will happen. In addition, though, there are always things we could improve. We need to attract more senior members, must work harder to bring in sponsorship revenue and our media profile could be better. However, if you offered our position to virtually every other club in Scotland, they'd bite your hand off. Watch this space.

Out with the old and in with the new Alastair Scott looks very happy to be handing over the reins to Vishal Marwaha. Vishal looks a just tad apprehensive - maybe wondering **what skeletons might have been left in the cupboard**.

WESTERN REACHES 120!

The club's celebrations of 120 years existence on May 26th went with a bang.

Opposition for the ladies section was provided by Hockey for Heroes, who had embarked on a gruelling eight day schedule to raise money for veterans' charities. The standard of hockey over three matches was exceptionally high, with the visitors winning the honours.

Scottish Hockey provided the opposition for the main feature against the men's 1sts. In an entertaining game both sides were committed to attack, and a 4-4 scoreline satisfied everyone. A big improvement on the efforts of our 1st XI against an SHA XI to celebrate our 60th year in 1958.

The dinner in the evening was the highlight, however. The decision to include partners, parents etc. was spectacularly successful, as testified by the convivial atmosphere. Friends of Western were well represented, and rather reminiscent of a team selection of yesteryear (3-3-4 of course): R. Gilmour; A. Duncan, K. McLernan and D. Ness; N. Sturrock, M. Kemp and I. Anderson; S. McIntosh, A. Scott, B. Johnson and C. McCall, with H. Andrew, A. Trainor and D. Starling. as the versatile subs. In the presentation of prizes the A.B. Carnegie Trophy for team of the year went to the women's 2nd team, and Alastair Scott received the Bill Matheson Trophy for outstanding service to the club.

Those who hadn't been around the club for a while were much impressed by the developments which have taken place in recent years and the air of optimism which pervades, not least in the significant contribution of the women's section to club activities. Let planning begin for our 125th in 2023.

When Western went to Europe for fun



This historic photo was unearthed from the archives. Historic, because this was the club's first foreign tour, in 1975, to the small Belgian town of La Louvière.

Organised by Kieran McLernan, the touring party comprised mainly 1st team squad players, with Ian Thomas and Andy Mackay added for ballast. Perhaps taking the hockey a tad more seriously than the other teams, a 4-1 defeat of Abbeville in the final was noisily appreciated by the hosts and the other teams.

Our visit coincided with a local religious festival, *Laetare* - the Carnival of the Gilles. It lasts three days, and takes place in the middle of Lent. The Gilles, in exotic costumes, roam the streets stomping to the rhythm of their music and distributing oranges to passers-by. To no-one's surprise this generosity soon descends into an orange fight, which was much enjoyed by the cricketers in our party, adept at throwing in a cricket ball from the outfield.

We remember Krish Nayar's passport being impounded by a suspicious hotel proprietor, and Dave Kerr scoring an impressive solo goal in the final. But not as impressive as his frantic solo drive to Hull to catch the Zebrugge Ferry just before cast-off after sleeping in and missing his lift.

Back row, l to r: Ian Anderson, Gus Scott and Robin Gilmour. Front: Jim Anderson, Kieran McLernan, Kiwi Ken Fergus and Bobby Hunter.

Little known fact (at least to non-Belgians) - La Louvière is the birthplace of Edin Hazard, the Chelsea & Belgium superstar.

New Members

We are delighted to welcome three new members to Friends of Western:

Stuart Dick's introduction to hockey came about over 25 years ago when he took his young son along to junior coaching and stayed to watch. He was approached by 'two strange fellows' and immediately went on the defensive, but it was only Craig McCall and Jimmy Cuthbertson looking for new recruits for the 5th XI. Son Simon has gone on to a very respectably career at the club, while Stuart has been a stalwart in the 5ths. Not one to allow hockey to interfere with his golf swing, Stuart's business acumen was a huge factor in the planning and development of the pitch replacement project. And he supports Nottingham Forest.

Kris Kane came through the ranks of the juniors to become 1st team fixture and international goalkeeper, winning 49 outdoor caps for Scotland and 5 indoor. A highly rated coach, he coached the men's 1sts whilst goalkeeper in two spells from 2007, culminating in the 2011 Scottish Cup win where he was outstanding in the final. He was also energetically involved in club affairs, with a talent for extortion, aka fund-raising. Kris is a lawyer, currently working in London.

David Mansouri is another product of the club's junior development programme. A versatile and forceful midfielder in the very successful side in the early years of this century while completing a medical degree, Dave won 19 caps between 2004 and 2006, culminating in selection for the '06 Commonwealth Games. His imperious form won him the 1st XI Player of the Year Trophy in 2012. Dave is a surgeon working in Glasgow.



New cap Rob Harwood in determined mode against Grange while pal Joe McConnell looks on admiringly

60th JUBILEE MATCH - WESTERN V SHA
4th October, 1958



The Western team was: Bill Matheson, R. Baird and A.N. Other; Colin Stuart, A. R. Muir and Jim Griffiths; Joe Hair, Steven Easton, David Hopkins, Gavin Walker and Jim Michael. The gent towering over Dr Bill is Ian Macewan, President and former Scotland goalkeeper. Shameful lack of club badges on shirts ...



S.H.A. XI: George Black (Steps); E.O. St John (Edinburgh Northern) and George Willoughby (Whitecraigs); D.R. Anderson (Inverleith), Robin Wilson (Clutha) and R.L. Crole (Edinburgh Northern); Gerry Carr (Morgan F.P.), Colin Crole (Edinburgh Northern) Jack Low and Gerry Robertson (Harris F.P.) and Robin Patterson (Cartha). Jackie Low's stick would be a suitable relic for the soon-to-open Dundee V & A Museum.

A report on the match was generous in blaming the weather-affected pitch for the poor quality of hockey, and manages to suggest that Western made a game of it whilst losing 0-5. No mention of how many St John saved. The Western XI and office-bearers were treated to coffee at the City Chambers by the Lord Provost on the morning of the game. How quaint!

For aged readers, seven internationalists including one Olympian - present or future - played in this game. Win a free season ticket to all the club's home matches for the coming season by naming them.