

THURSDAY – wind, Watson, Will and winning.

For some competitors, Thursday is a very gentle affair, with just the Prince of Wales (15 shots at 600 yards) to shoot, to complete their Grand Aggregate. For others, it is incredibly busy, with a late detail of the PoW followed by the National Match (or the Overseas, or the AG Bell) in the afternoon, and then the 2nd Stage of the St. George's. Your correspondent was in the latter camp, hence this late blog; but his PoW detail was an early one, at 08:00. "O joy!" was the first thought, on seeing the squadding and making the early decision to curtail Wednesday's socialising not long after dark. "O joy! 08:00 – there won't be any wind!" But there was. Oh there was. We all cursed as we dealt with far more "interesting" conditions than an 08:00 detail ever had the right to throw at us... until we went out to see the leader of the Grand in the 11:40 detail, and realised we had got off lightly. By that time, the wind was rushing through from anything between half past eleven and half past nine on the clock face, with values between about ½ minute left and 5 left, mostly driven by swift angle changes. Parag Patel had dropped a point at 08:55 and Chris Watson had dropped a point at 10:45, so David Armstrong needed a 74 to win the Grand. Normally, a dead cert... but in these conditions? 'Milko' started with three V bulls, but then dropped his fourth just out to the right (by which time his partner had already dropped about five points – it was that hard), meaning he had to get all the rest in. V, V, V, 5 (all a bit right of centre), then a 4 just out on the left... and Chris Watson had won the Grand! A further right handed shot, last to count, left David 4th in the Grand, behind Chris in 1st, Parag in 2nd and Rick Shouler in 3rd. Brilliant shooting by all of them.

With the conclusion of the Grand Aggregate, there also finished a great many other aggregates – too many to list here. To see them all, go to the NRA website and look under Imperial Meeting Results. A few special ones will be highlighted, however: Chris Watson won the V-Bulls Agg, Glyn Barnett the Sighters Agg, Pa-ckman (Patel and Luckman) the Fulton Pairs by six Vs from the Lincoln Imps, and the Glen Family won the Families without dropping a point. Oh and Simon Osmond (one of the Lincoln Imps) won the Prince of Wales outright with a superb 75.14.

The National Match followed in the afternoon, with the challenging conditions requiring quick thinking by the wind coaches and quick firing by the shooters. It wasn't quite as hard as that last PoW detail, but the wind was much trickier than in most years. Scotland, who used almost all the available time at 300 yards, felt they had coped with it well to lose 15 points for 685.75, and were well ahead of Ireland (676) and champions Wales (672), but England had put in a stunning performance to lead by eight points and a huge 22 V-bulls on 693.97. At 500 yards, the Scots were first to finish, their score of 674.68 this time edging Wales (673) and Ireland (670), but a long way behind England's 689.94. England were now 18 off, Scotland 41 off, and Ireland and Wales neck-and-neck on 54 off. The result seemed a foregone conclusion, and so it proved as, in still difficult conditions, England's firers and coaches put on another strong performance to drop 19 points, to Scotland's 35, Ireland's 29 and Wales's 26. Final totals: England 1st on 2063.270, Scotland 2nd on 2024.209, Wales 3rd on 2020.191 and Ireland 4th on 2017.203. As well as the very healthy points margin, look at that huge difference between England's V-bulls total and the rest. Quality shooting!

Alongside, Canada (1217.129) won the Overseas by a point from Guernsey, with Jersey, Australia and Kenya further back. And the UK Cadets (1211.133) beat the Royal Canadian Army Cadets by 11 points.

All that remained was the 2nd Stage of the St. George's at 6pm. The wind still appeared strong, but was rather steadier than in the afternoon, allowing for some strong scoring, albeit not as strong as in many years. There were 18 scores of 150, the best of which were 150.25s by Will Broad (OERC) and Alex Coetzee (South Africa). Broad won the tie-shoot for the second stage, alongside which seven

scores of 148.15 shot for the final three places in the final, which were claimed by RCQ Martin (Army), Tom Drysdale (City of Newcastle) and L Malcic (Athelings).

Another St.George, Andrew St.G Tucker, would have been delighted to see the throng outside the English XX Clubhouse during the evening, who were all enjoying a “Last Hurrah!” with music, food and good company, much of which was masterminded by Henry Day. The “Last Hurrah!” was for the clubhouse, which the club is giving up after one and a quarter centuries. We wish them well with their forthcoming ‘virtual club’.