

TUESDAY – County honours shared

Tuesday brings with it just one individual match - the first stage of the St. George's, comprising 15 shots at 300 yards. The afternoon and early evening are taken up by team matches: the County Long Range and Inter-Services Long Range at 900 and 1000 yards, and the County Championship Short Range and Inter-Services Short Range at 300 and 600 yards.

Fitting in five details of fifteen shots in the morning requires an early start, and so it was that the first competitors in the St. George's commenced firing at 08:00. The lucky beggars! Traditionally the earliest detail is quite straightforward, and so it appeared to be today, for many. By late morning, however, the wind was varying in strength and angle, so that the wind value ranged from about $\frac{3}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ minutes right – trickier, but readable as long as you didn't stay on aim for too long.

Impressively, there were 102 maximum possible scores of 75 recorded this morning. The 103rd placed firer, Mike Wong Shui from Canada, will be kicking himself about the inner he fired in the middle of his string to leave him with a 74.14; there was only one 75.15 scored, by Australian team member Steve Negus of Canberra RC. Concurrently, Steve also won the Gurkha Appeal with the same score, while Kip Morton (RAF) won the Foster on 75.12 and Aubrey Sonnenberg (Australia) won the Falklands with 74.9

Of more importance to many, the cut-off to get into the 2nd Stage of the St. George's was 73.9, with twenty such scores making it through. In the Grand Aggregate, Chris Watson remains '1 off' and still leads by two points. All but one of those to have dropped 9 points (out of 475) are now inside the top 50.

Onto the team matches. While the various armed services and the cadets did battle at one end of the range, all the counties competed across the rest of it, first in the County Long Range at 900 and 1000 yards. The squadding seemed random, as last year's highest placed counties were separated by some distance on the range. At 900 yards, there was a fair degree of apparent variation in the wind, with only some of it transferring to the fall of shot – it paid not to over-wind the sights at times. At the end of the first distance, Surrey had averaged 49 in the middle of the range to lead by one point from London, with several other counties six points or so back.

As the teams moved back to 1000 yards, it became apparent that the squadding was a bit awry. It seemed as if there were two large blocks of counties which had simply been swapped over, with each county occupying the same position within the block; so, for instance, counties that were next to each other in the middle of the match at 900 yards were on the extreme left and right hand ends at 1000 yards. On the right hand side, upwind, wind values were slightly lower and there were lots of flags to be used for judging angle of wind; on the left, downwind, the wind values were greater and there were no flags available for angle, so one's gut instinct had to be trusted! Competitors seemed in agreement that there are two logical and fair ways to do long range team match squadding on Stickle-down: either seed the match from the centre outwards and have teams swap positions between 900 and 1000 yards such that they are as far from the middle on one side at 1000 as they had been on the other at 900; or simply to draw randomly for targets at 900 but make sure that, when teams' target numbers at 900 and 1000 yards are added together, all those totals are equal.

Members of quite a few teams expressed a desire today to see one of those methods in next year's match, and indeed in the Mackinnon on Saturday (where recent practice has been to draw randomly at 900 but then seed 1000 yards according to the 900 result, which effectively embeds any (dis)advantage gained by (un)favourable seeding at 900!).

Anyway, back to the match... at 1000 yards, London had a scary start, with one of their best shots (TLB) recording a miss with his (sole) sighter. Coach Matt Charlton sent him off the firing point to have everything checked while firer number two (Sandy Walker) knocked in a 49.1, and then returned with exactly the same sight settings to score a 4 first to count. Phew. Surrey suffered a clear target later on in the distance; both thus allowed Hertfordshire (under Martin Townsend) to claw back a few points, while all those teams coped better than the opposition with wind that varied quickly between 4 to 8 minutes (or 3 to 6ish at the other end of the firing point). Herts closed the gap but ended the match in third place on 574.49 (top score Jeremy Thompson 99.11). Surrey, coached by Bill Richards, finished second on 577.50 (David Crispin 98.11), leaving London the victors on 577.62 (Ed Jeens 98.14). Special mention to East of Scotland for an excellent performance to earn them fourth place under coach Craig Stewart. The British Army won the Inter-Services Long Range by 21 points with 1119.89.

The weather remained pleasant but the wind remarkably fresh for the County Short Range. At 300 yards, Hampshire made an excellent start to drop only two points. At 600 yards, the rain clouds started to gather but only a little drizzle ensued late during the shoot, as the wind also picked up...to be met with varying degrees of patience by the teams. Hampshire just managed to hold on, winning the match with 790.110. Surrey were once again pipped on Vs, with 790.105. Yorkshire were 3rd on 790.98, while London were a point behind on 789.101, to leave Surrey the winners of the County Championship Victor Ludorum by a single point, having been runners-up in both matches. Well done all. The British Army, on 1168.126, won the Inter-Services Short Range by a single point from the UK Cadets.

Tomorrow, the Queen's...