

WGMA-LX GRANDMASTERS FESTIVAL AT NOTTINGHAM: THE EVENT



'Robin Hood' set the tone for the tournament as players from around the world congregated in Nottingham to play Grandmasters hockey! Teams from Argentina, Australia, the USA, as well as many players from Japan as part of the world Alliance teams, joined with those from Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scotland, Wales and of course England for the festival. Competing in 5-year age groupings from 60 to over 80 years old, Radio Nottingham was totally amazed at the participation numbers and impressed with the welcome at the Opening Ceremony.



Many of the 46 teams came to practice ahead of the event which started in earnest on Monday 30th June. Over the next 7 days, and 131 matches later, gold, silver and bronze medals would be decided for the top 3 teams in each age group category; Over 60, 65, 70, 75 and 80s men and Over 60 and 65 women. Mike Talbot, the Technical Delegate and his team controlled the proceedings from the panorama afforded from his upstairs office, together with the Umpire Manager, Richard Kirk, and alongside Graham 'Smoggy' Small as LX's programme guru.

The programme consisted of a series of round robin groupings with those emerging to play in further round robin or classification games in a format determined by entry numbers. All teams played 6 games, except the over 80s. Scheduling was a challenge, but with 5 pitches available, only some of the LX host teams had to play twice in one day. Matches came thick and fast in a continuous programme that required masterful

management of the 40 umpires, match officials and the results service. Daily reviews ensured consistency.

There were some fabulous matches along the way. On day one, in their second match of that day, LX 70 Men's Reds fought out a tough 1-1 draw with Spain's Sixteberians in testing temperatures, whilst on day 2 the LX Over 70's Ladies, as part of the 65s competition, ran the Dutch Lions close dipping out 2-1. During the week there was a rousing Over 80s match where the Celts fought back to draw 1-1 with Alliance. England Hockey President, Alex Danson-Bennett performed the honours to start the 75s match between LX White v Belgium Old Lions on the show pitch that ended all square at 1-1.





Inevitably there were a few shock results, but there was no denying the intensity of the matches as we approached the business end of the week! There were some nail-biting medal games; on the Saturday, the Red Roses (USA) over 60's and Buenos Airies Masters fought out a very lively 0-0 draw and then claimed the Bronze medal winning 3-2 on flicks. In possibly the match of the tournament, Buenos Aries Masters 65 Men locked horns with LX 65 Reds in a game that drew a large crowd to witness many scoring opportunities. It ended 2-2 but, after plenty of goalkeeping heroics in the 16 penalty flicks that followed, the Argentinian side secured gold coming out on top 5-4 to the deafening acclaim of their supporters. In another dramatic Bronze medal match, LX 60 Reds lost out to the Wanderers from down under, 4-3 on penalties after the game finished with a flourish at 2-2 in regulation time.



The rain stayed away until the final day when a few flash downpours tested the medal presentation timings! The results were:

	Gold	Sliver	Bronze
Over 60 Men	British United Brothers	Scottish Thistles	The Wanderers
Over 65 Men	Buenos Airies Masters	LX Blue	LX Red
Over 70 Men	LX Red	Sixteberians	Scottish Thistles
Over 75 Men	LX Red	LX White	Welsh Dragons
Over 80 Men	LX Red	Alliance	Celtic
Over 60 Women	Scottish Thistles	LX Ladies	Red Roses
Over 65 Women	LX Ladies Blue	Dutch Ladies	Red Roses



The tournament was a great success and a true testament to the players who keep themselves in shape to compete in such a demanding competition with great spirit and endeavour. The buzz and camaraderie during the week in and around the bar and coffee outlets was amazing and why not as, remarkably, a total of 11 different nation sides medalled; a brilliant outcome. The officiating was outstanding, the call for first aid was mercifully very low and the venue was brilliant in every way.

WGMA-LX GRANDMASTERS FESTIVAL NOTTINGHAM: THE BACK STORY

The aim was to stage a high quality, international hockey event to celebrated LX's 30th anniversary in 2025, by creating a festive, relaxed environment around a truly competitive tournament that embraced the spirit of the worldwide grand master's hockey.

With this in mind, in December 2023 (before all the luggage had returned from the Argentinian Tour!) the LX Chair proposed that we might secure the endorsement of the WGMA to host a tournament; the next in the series of highly successful WGMA events that had been held across Europe in previous years. The Committee supported the concept and after some discussion with the WGMA President, a formal proposal was submitted in February 2024.

Theme

What was Nottingham famous for; why Robin Hood of course! Everyone we spoke to around the world told us about the legend! So that became the 'logo' and was used as a subliminal theme for much of the Festival trappings. It worked brilliantly.

Background Research

We took some wide-ranging feedback from previous tournaments including the Hague, and together with experience from within LX, identified a list the areas that we had to

deliver well and changes we might consider in order to avoid previous 'pitfalls'. This was an extremely valuable exercise that shaped our decision making.

The Date and Venue

Optimistically, we took an internal sounding in January 24 seeking expressions of interest in joining an organising committee to gauge the strength of support from our membership. We were not short of volunteers! In addition, and equally critical to success was the need to identify a time that did not clash with other events, and to have access to the right facilities; both extremely challenging in an increasingly congested world master's hockey calendar! We can say that although Nottingham was not WGMA's favoured location, it was ours, primarily because of its ability to stage all matches in one place and that the centre Director and Manager, David Griffiths, was highly motivated by the prospect. It was also relatively easy to get to.

However, even by starting the process more than a year ahead, it was a difficult to nail down a date and it was a great relief when, in April 2024, a date of 29 June to 6 July was finally agreed with England Hockey, the WMH and the Nottingham Hockey Centre which, at the time, avoided all other events. We were now able to go public and tell all our hockey friends around the world of the date and venue and circulate flyers at various big events across Europe in April and May!

The Organisation

From the initial expressions of interest, the Chair set up a group to start thinking about the task. Although coming together informally to agree a few early actions in March, the first full Organising Committee meeting was held in May 2024 and the group met subsequently most months, including an on-site meeting at Nottingham in October 2024. Meetings were lengthy! With such a qualified and experienced bunch, the key strategic areas were finalised in a brainstorming session; Hockey Programme, Hockey Management, Health and Safety, Social Programme, Communication, Marketing and Funding, Merchandise and External Offering. These became the focus for planning and action thereafter and volunteers were matched up with each of the key roles.



The group developed a timeline of deliverables for each area, on a single sheet of paper leading from the first meeting to the start of the Festival. This was a crucial part of ensuring a fully integrated approach. We soon dispensed with the concept of a Closing ceremony and replaced it with an Opening event to set the tone. Branding and





communication consistency was considered essential Graham Moore kept tight control of this, and worked closely with John Housham who masterminded the programme and content of Newsletters and with Webby, who explored and exploited the Tournify app to further enhance communication through the LX Website. Specific links were established with as many organisations as we could identify and Smoggy started the long process of gaining team interest and registration, as well as starting to scope the playing programme options. Trish Slator, with all her medical experience, set about

identifying criteria for us to provide the right level of First Aid at the Tournament and other general aspects of health and safety. No stone remained unturned. She gathered bids for the task, and we were delighted that the most favourable proposal submitted was from Edwin Knight who not only met all of our stringent requirements but had worked with LX over several years to provide physiotherapy support. Even better, the first aid service was further strengthened daily, on site, by doctors from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Naturally, Edwin and his team also provided the first-class physio service to all but we did produce a protocol for teams who wished to bring their own support. Steve Seymour had the unenviable task of recruiting the Officials. We needed the best. Barry Anderson provided significant assistance to both scope the manpower requirement, make connections and encourage applicants to participate. Steve was able to announce the appointment of senior officials in February and then the selection



of umpires and match officials was made from applicants 6 weeks later. We really wanted to look after our officials as they would have such a bearing on the event. Creating the social ambience was engineered by Tracy Perkins who worked with David at the Centre and set up the opening party, the Latin Night and the Traditional evening. The visit we made to Nottingham to review the main social event options was well worth it as Tracy settled on the Revolucion de Cuba and how amazing was that Latin Night... an unforgettable atmosphere.....



and something that would be talked about for many years. And as for the quality of Fish and Chips that came from the van on the Friday Traditional evening; incredulous!



Working with local groups was very important to us and eventually, we found a perfect Robin Hood (named Robin) and his talented Merry Band. They were brilliant and a real attraction at the Opening Ceremony. In the local offerings department, Jan Ahmed was our shaker and mover; he had links with the offices of both the Sherriff and the Lord Lieutenant as well as local sporting icon, Richard Whitehead, all who graced our opening Ceremony alongside John Wilmott (so very sadly no longer with us) and Ben Rae, the respective Presidents of WGMA and LX. What a great team they were. We enlisted the help of the Wilford Bowmen to run the highly popular Archery competition over 2 days; 19 teams entered and it was held in safe area behind pitches 4 and 5, with administration of participants arranged by Irene Randall. There were plenty of prizes!



The local Ripley Morris dancers provided a very English welcome on the Friday evening to entice tired legs to step out as it was to enjoy the music from local musicians that graced the event throughout the week.



Other members of the core committee; Owen Carr who stepped into the Memorabilia breach. It was a tough area to make progress with but his wonder idea of setting up a card reader for LX solved almost all of our on-site money concerns and he liaised with the Nottingham shop! Fozzy acted as Committee Sec and focus for Charities (we entertained 4 and collected nearly £5k towards Alzheimers). Martin Hall was an absolute trojan in the design and production of medals, badges, sail flags, festival shirts and publicity materials. Ian Harvey kept us on track with the project Action Plan and also negotiated a deal with the trams.

The Committee was enlarged as sub-activities developed. Finance was the bailiwick of our treasurer, Peter Glading, The organising committee had made some strategic decisions such as team entry costs based on some reasonably sound expenditure estimates and then handed this to Peter(!), who in his true style made sure nothing slipped through the net, that everything was accounted for and no wrinkles or dark corners existed as we moved forward! What should be mentioned is we had 2 hiccups (yes only 2), and between Tracy and Peter, we were able to secure rebates that went to individuals where possible or to charity where not. Joe Dowling stepped up to run the Opening Ceremony; he had no idea what he was letting himself in for; stage managing



the players, the volunteers, the dignitaries, the entertainers and the technologies around it! Steve Crute looked to create a user friendly 'map' of the event and also became 'Mr Gazebo' as he put together a tented village! Viv Stokes agreed to set up the information centre and bring together a roster of some 20 green shirted volunteers that created a focus for tickets, memorabilia, photos, local information and much, much more throughout the week. Chris Randall sought to attract sponsorship without much success but alighted (with the help of others) on an idea for an LX Patrons which was



highly successful, attracting 87 members. In effect the Patrons, who gathered during the tournament for a drinks party on the balcony in their unique dark blue shirts, provided the immensely popular and substantial festival medals. The official photographer throughout was the talented Paul Quinn, who worked tirelessly to turn round team photos and be at all the key moments of the week.

Other important contributions were made to provide accommodation, which was as an interesting bag; Carla was our local rep handling requests direct from teams, but LX also entered into a contract with the University in order to secure en-suite rooms in large numbers for teams travelling greater distances. Of course, Jez Allen did a super job setting up LX accommodation.

Other notable contributors include Richard Slator who set up the Buddie system to support each overseas team, Mike Greenbury who created some excellent publicity videos, Graham Beck who had an amazing medallion struck for the officials, and Neil Cole who set up the pre order and ticket purchasing system. Many others helped set up and close down the event.

There was never a shortage of volunteers and in all over 100 members were involved; it was always a case of trying to put round pegs in round holes. What transpired was an incredibly effective group and be emphasised is the attention to detail applied by committee members in each activity area, and their making of firm, timely and harmonised decisions enable us to focus capacity on the critical outcomes. We were of course indebted to David Griffiths and his team who were magnificent throughout.



Entries and Visiting Teams

Entry numbers were absolutely critical to both the financial viability and the creation of the right ambiance at the event. We calculated that 45 entries put things on a sound footing. At one stage we were looking at 56 plus teams across all age groups and that was, sadly, without our friends Southern Cross, who had already committed to go to a later tournament in Europe. In the end, the unfortunate rescheduling of the Celtic Cup to clash with the second festival weekend and some inevitable withdrawals.

Nevertheless, we were delighted to retain 46 teams and we know how hard managers and teams worked to ensure they arrived on time and had credible squads for the demands on 6 games in 7 days.

Reflection

LX received so many congratulatory messages that the Club can reflect with great pride that through a genuine team effort, in every sense of the word, we were able to delivery a superb hockey festival that met our intentions in every way. It was a true celebration to commemorate the development of our Club from its humble beginnings 30 years ago and gather together the hockey family of older legs.....and maybe we will wait a while before we do it again!

THE VISIT FROM ENGLAND HOCKEY PRESIDENT ; ALEX DANSON-BENNETT

The Festival was truly honoured when the President of England Hockey, the world famous player Alex Danson-Bennett came to visit. Smoggy made the original approach over a year before and that was cemented by our President. Met on arrival by the LX Chair, Alex was absolutely brilliant at ehgaging with everyone involved with the event. She bumped into a disbelieving LX 60's squad pitchside before attending a light lunch where she was joined by all the 'top brass' and also presented the England Hockey lifetime Award to Graham Griffiths (David's Dad) for services to hockey and the creation of the Centre. Alex had a great conversation with Victor Vinue, the Argentinian 65s captain (and himself a full international), whose farther had competed as a goalkeeper in the London Olympics of 1948. Alex was fascinated by the memorabilia he brought with him and the similarities and contrasts to her experience in 2012, reflecting on her

battles with Ayma and heard of stories from our tour to Argentina the previous year, when Victor was a super host and Bede, Webby and I organisers in the field!



Alex showed an incredible interest in all aspects of the festival; meeting firstly with the tournament management team, many of our volunteers, the medical team, the Centre staff. She checked out the officials on pitch and performed the pre-match courtesies for an over 75s match; Old Lions of Belgium v LX Whites on the show pitch. She chatted with many players and exchanged plenty of banter with the Australians! Both Presidents



enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the great expansion and camaraderie of hockey for older players and Alex was truly amazed by the size of the event and performance levels on show. We hope she was as impressed with us as we were with her. We wish her all the very best in her Presidency and remain ever grateful that she had the time to visit.

