



Club Captain's Report 2020

It is very difficult to know where to start my report for 2020. We approached this year with much anticipation and after continuing our financial recovery in 2019, we had good reason to be confident – membership was growing steadily, visitor numbers were rising, we had an enthusiastic and committed staff in place and likewise, a stable board was working hard, all with ambitions within their own areas. 2020 promised much - the atmosphere at the club was that of positivity as we started the social side of things off in fine style at our sold out Burns' Supper. 2019 Ladies Captain, Rona Sarafilovic, did an amazing job putting the evening together and our speakers did not disappoint! In late February, when the word 'coronavirus' was not in our everyday language and was something taking place somewhere else, our ever-aware Treasurer, Chris Higgo asked to meet and advised me that, in his opinion, a 'pandemic' could possibly threaten the future of Muckhart Golf Club.

No one could have foreseen what followed and even Chris could not have anticipated the scale of Covid-19 and its impact on all of us. Closing the golf club a week before the official start to the season was very difficult, following and keeping up with guidance and regulations that were changing daily was stressful for all concerned and our thanks must go to our staff and board members who all stepped up and took responsibility for their respective areas. Over the next two months, I visited the club daily, which was not enjoyable; with near-perfect weather, to see the fairways and clubhouse empty was frustrating. On a positive note, several 'local' members who could travel to the club abiding by lockdown restrictions (i.e. walking!) carried out a variety of tasks in the cottage, in the clubhouse and on the courses that would have been difficult to get done during normal operations.

Throughout the lockdown, Chris (Higgo) worked tirelessly, keeping up with government support options, grants and regulations and updating the board on our financial outlook on a weekly basis. Thanks to his diligence, by the time we reached a possible re-opening, we were confident that barring further setbacks, we might be able to recover our position. Re-opening proved even more challenging than closing down as we tried to keep abreast of ever-changing guidelines and regulations, which were sometimes complicated and often required interpretation at a local level. Despite not being able to meet, board members made themselves readily available to discuss matters and made quick decisions, which were carried out professionally by our staff. Members and their guests must be thanked for their co-operation and flexibility as we were forced to operate under revised conditions and rules. With these changing frequently, it was imperative that members were willing to work with us, which they did.

Golf as a sport bounced back spectacularly in the summer and Muckhart Golf Club did not miss out. All sections have seen increased numbers as we welcomed over 160 new members, member guest round numbers surged and we were inundated with visitors. Once we were able to re-open the Bar, members gave us their full support and the fantastic atmosphere we had hoped for, finally arrived.



The opportunity to re-start competitive golf in June brought fresh challenges. As he has done so often over the years, Andy Crichton took much of this responsibility on and, at a time when we needed as much help as we could get, this took a huge weight off our shoulders. Andy's customary, thorough attention to detail combined with his vast experience ensured that the return of competitive golf was a success. Andy does a huge amount of work behind the scenes in a normal year but the challenges we faced this year meant that we relied even more on his experience and commitment. This ranged from implementing new playing guidelines, re-establishing competitions, compressing the tournament calendar, processing scores and results, dealing with the increased volume of new handicaps and making himself available to discuss the many amendments we had to introduce along the way. Representatives from the Ladies, Senior and Junior sections should also be mentioned as we all worked together. Despite the late start to the season, all sections managed to play most of their usual competitions and each one has prepared their own reports. The evergreen Iain Gwynne became Senior Champion and we saw an unusual scenario in the Gents, Ladies and Junior Club Championships as James Barrett, Jen Saxton and Luke Volland successfully defended all three titles respectively. Well done to Iain, James, Jen and Luke and also to 15 year-old Lewis Seath who won the Kidd Rosebowl (Gents Matchplay Championship); Lewis won the qualifier and then dominated the matchplay stage, producing his best golf in the final against the experienced Dave McGinigal. Pandemic restrictions put paid to external team competitions so nothing to report there sadly. Some individual county events did take place though and another of our juniors, Alex Turlik, claimed the 2020 Perth & Kinross County Gents' Championship. Congratulations to all prizewinners, but overall, I think most people were just pleased that we had any sort of season at all!

We did manage to complete a few planned projects this year, starting with the replacement of the path on the 11th tee. The Cowden tree harvest will be completed once we have a chance to burn the brash that remains. We are working on plans for re-planting under the expert guidance of Johnny Stewart and Colin Mann. The long awaited driveway renovation, originally scheduled for late March, had to be postponed until October but was worth the wait. We were very fortunate to have the experience and expertise of Alastair McNally on hand as he acted on our behalf throughout the planning stage and the actual project. Thank you very much to the members who took the time to send their appreciation to us and of course to those who contributed to the cost of this project. While it might be slightly disappointing to note that fewer than 20% of our members donated to a project that benefits 100% of us, we shall focus on the commitment of that minority! We have a few projects lined up this winter - on and off the course - and are sure that you will approve of the results. As our primary asset, we continue to prioritise the golf courses and have worked closely with Paul to enhance his equipment inventory and finance the long and short-term improvements he is determined to make. Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of one particular member, we were able to purchase a new tractor - this would definitely not have been possible without that help and this has accelerated our plans in this area.



We were delighted that so many of our corporate partners continued their involvement with the club. They will also have been through a challenging year and we appreciate their ongoing support. The best way for us as members to show our gratitude is to give our partners our custom so I urge you to do so – we are associated with some outstanding businesses whether you are looking for advice or service in the fields of joinery, building preservation, insurance, house removals, physiotherapy, woodland management, construction, opticians, employment law, accountancy, storage units, employee benefits, vehicle maintenance and of course, the finest bakers in the country! We have space for more partners so if you or anyone you know might be interested please let us know.

As always, Steve put in a big shift in the Pro Shop throughout the season and with solid back up from Jonny and Craig, made sure that the golf operation ran seamlessly. While golfers might only see shop staff for a few minutes at a time, 10 and 11 hour shifts are not uncommon during the summer and of course, as we keep saying, 2020 proved even more challenging than usual. Craig secured fulltime work in Edinburgh so we said farewell to him in September but Dylan has fitted into the team quickly and, being similarly 'multi-skilled' (Pro Shop and Bar), has already become a valuable asset to us. Jonny's first year at Muckhart Golf Club probably wasn't what he expected and he was thrown into the deep end once we re-opened. He has settled in very well but is hoping for more time to prepare for the 2021 season than we had in 2020! With regard to their day-to-day work, the staff members who faced the greatest difficulties this year were our greenkeepers. To describe their year as a challenge is a vast understatement and we must acknowledge Paul, Sandy and William's commitment and determination to overcome all of the obstacles they faced, including unseasonal temperatures and drought in the spring, more rain than usual in the summer and of course, the pandemic itself, which impacted their preparations immensely. We were able to bring Euan in for the season and he immediately embraced the team ethos that Paul has created over the last two years. In September we asked Euan if he would stay on in a fulltime capacity and we were delighted that he agreed. Expanding the team to four is a big step but we shall continue our quest to increase this number further. It would be wrong not to mention the very large number of volunteers who give up so much of their time to help on the course. Without them, our small team would not be able to keep on top of bunkers, divots, burns and general maintenance. Thank you very much to all of them and a special mention to Drew 'Kiwi' Dunn for the number of hours he spent on a fairway mower throughout the summer! Overall, particularly taking circumstances into account, on behalf of all members, I would like to offer a huge vote of thanks to Jonny, Paul, Sandy, William, Euan, Steve, Craig and Dylan. When you receive your 2021 membership renewal invoice, you will notice an option to include a staff gratuity. In the absence of a membership fee increase this year, please bear our staff members in mind - willing volunteers are valuable but can only do so much without a team of dedicated staff. Sadly, we said goodbye to our caterer of three seasons, Scott Staszek, due to personal reasons. Scott has been instrumental in our resurgence since he joined and we thank him for his hard work and contribution. Recruitment of a replacement has been made more difficult due to the uncertainty the hospitality industry is facing but we hope to bring good news soon. In the meantime, thank you to those who are supporting our winter catering - this has been very well received, especially Margaret-Elspeth Harman's homemade soup!



Speaking of volunteers, I would like to express my own thanks to our Board of Directors. The support and time given by this small group of people is extraordinary. Ian Barker, Gillian Doig, Dave Izatt, Rona Sarafilovic, Ben Thornber and Rosemary Turlik all bring their own, invaluable skills to the board and club but even these are overshadowed by their determination to propel the club forward at all times. With the greatest respect to all of these directors though, it would be wrong not to single out our Treasurer, Chris Higgo. No one puts in more hours or achieves more than Chris, especially given the importance of the role. Chris has spent the last three years analysing every aspect of our business and constantly finds ways for us to reduce costs, work more efficiently and increase revenues. With our overall losses decreasing since Chris began his term at the beginning of 2018, our 2020 target was to break even. This outcome seemed a long way off in March but thanks to a huge team effort, driven by Chris' overall control of the finances, Muckhart Golf Club has returned a profit for the first time in many years. While we benefitted from a general resurgence in the golf industry as well as government support, taking full advantage of this was only possible due to the position Chris has been working towards since 2018. Chris' board term ends officially this year but I am pleased to advise that he has agreed to stay on for 2021, pending member approval. I cannot understate Chris' value to Muckhart Golf Club and all of us owe him our gratitude. Graeme McCarte is assisting Chris with much of the finance side of things, which is very helpful and much appreciated

While a stable board brings continuity and reassurance, we agreed as a group that some fresh perspective and energy would be beneficial to the board and the club as a whole. With Rosemary stepping down from her role as Junior Convenor, Colin Melville has agreed to take over this vital role. Colin is a good golfer who plays regularly, as his does his son, Adam, who shows great potential. He also brings some prior golf management experience to the board and will certainly be a big help. Our thanks to Rosemary for everything she has done for the Junior Section over the last four years. More recently, Scott Marshall accepted an invitation from the board to become the first Gents' Captain at Muckhart Golf Club. Given Scott's popularity, he needs little introduction; he is well respected by all and the feedback from his appointment has been very positive. Finally, after five years without an Honorary President, the board unanimously agreed that we should approach Johnny Stewart. Johnny accepted without hesitation and we are honoured to have him involved. Johnny, Scott and Colin have many ideas that will benefit all of our members. With their experience and commitment to the club, they are a welcome addition to the board of directors and I thank them for 'stepping up'.

The Coronavirus and its associated restrictions and frustrations have dominated this year and like the rest of the world, we are hoping that next year we can regain some semblance of normality. Despite the challenges, we should remember that Covid-19 has personally affected many people, fellow members included. With that in mind, perhaps those of us who stayed healthy should remain grateful that we managed to play golf at all in 2020.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my sincere thanks to every one of our members for their continued patience, understanding and above all, ongoing support of Muckhart Golf Club.

Chris Turlik
Club Captain