

## European GC Club League Ealing Heat - May 2024

It was in March 2023 that Charles Sale, a member of Ealing Croquet Club and a man who had earned his living from travelling the world reporting on major sports events, spotted an opportunity to visit one capital city for the first time while also indulging his passion for playing croquet. Ealing was duly entered into the Latvian heat of the inaugural GC European Club League, which was to take place in Riga later that year.

Fast forward 15 months and, bitten by the European league bug, Ealing is now hosting a heat of its own. Players from Croquet Club Zurich, Real Club Puerta de Hierro and Sussex County Croquet Club enjoyed a sunny Saturday in Ealing's Lammas Park on day one of a keenly fought contest.

Ealing belied their status as underdogs by winning the opening doubles against Zurich with Sale and teammate Simon Turner just overcoming Volker Herrmann & Daniel Studerus. The rest of the match was nip and tuck with an eventual 5-5 draw and a point each for the protagonists.

Meanwhile in the other match a very strong Spanish team beat Sussex County 7-3 and it was clear already that they would take some stopping.

The second round of matches saw Real Club beat Ealing 6-4, a match notable for a clean sweep of 3 victories apiece for Stephen Harbron (Ealing) and Nicolas Denizot (Real Club).

The other match between Sussex County and Zurich was finely poised when it was decided to end play for the day in favour of firing up the barbeque and a bit of pan-European socialising.

The weather forecast for Sunday was looking tricky, but the games left over from the previous evening were played in glorious sunshine and Sussex County stormed through to win the match 7-3 and this time it was Nigel Billingham (Sussex) who enjoyed a clean sweep of games.

The Madrid club were clear favourites going into the third round but could Zurich stop them? First of all, though to the all-English tussle between Sussex County and Ealing. Things started badly for the hosts, losing both doubles games despite a brave effort by Harbron and Bridget Goodman who lost by the narrowest of margins to Steve Chapman and Bob Clark. The hosts 0-2 and staring the wooden spoon in the face. There then followed a sensational sequence of games with consecutive victories for Harbron, Goodman, Sean Doherty and Emma Bowen-Doherty. Two further wins by Doherty and Harbron sealed the victory for the hosts.

Victories for Daniel Studerus and for the pairing of Studerus and Neil Thomas could not prevent an emphatic win for the team from Madrid, who ran out worthy winners of the competition having won all three of their matches. Many congratulations to Denizot, Paz Gonzalez de Aguilar, Jacobo Garay and Carolina Ruiz de Alda – worthy winners indeed.

Final placings:

1<sup>st</sup> An emphatic win by Real Club Puerta de Hierro with 3w, 0d, 0l.

2<sup>nd</sup> The surprise package of the weekend, Ealing CC with 1w, 1d, 1l.

3<sup>rd</sup> Following their loss to Ealing on day 2, Sussex County CC with 1w, 0d, 2l.

4<sup>th</sup> With a tough final day against our visitors from Spain, CC Zurich with 0w, 1d, 2l.

As Tournament manager I would like to thank all the players for their impeccable behaviour, Richard Carline who was a constant source of good advice in his role of Referee of Tournament, Jane Powell for her deft handling of Croquet Scores and for generally helping out whenever needed, Christine Mason for lots of help with the catering, John Hutchinson for manning the BBQ and Jane Hutchinson and Sali Turner for their help in providing food.

Simon Turner