



## SPRING NEWSLETTER 2022

### HALFORD HEWITT VICTORY SPECIAL 2

*'They've only gone and done it again!'*

2012	Charterhouse	"	Epsom
2013	Eton	"	Tonbridge
2014	Merchiston	"	Bradfield
2015	Eton	"	Kings Canterbury
2016	Tonbridge	"	Radley
2017	Epsom	"	Ampleforth
2018	Winchester	"	Ampleforth
2019	Malvern	"	Ampleforth
2020	No Competition		
2021	Loretto	"	Sherborne
2022	Loretto	"	Tonbridge



Like the proverbial London bus, we wait 94 years and then two Halford Hewitt Cups come along in successive years. Only six schools had ever managed the feat of defending the Halford Hewitt; Eton, Charterhouse, Harrow, Rugby, Tonbridge and Rossall. Now there are seven. Last year's first victory was magnificent and a great achievement in finally getting the first win. Yet, in some ways, this second victory was even better. Last year was a strange tournament; being Covid delayed it was the first to be held in September and many of the big names got defeated early on. In truth, after a tight match against Ampleforth in the third round, Loretto cruised through the quarters, semi-finals and final to win comfortably. This year was altogether different; meeting a surprisingly strong Trent team in the third round then Charterhouse in the quarter final, Haileybury in the semis to set up a final against Tonbridge, the top ranked Halford Hewitt school of the last ten years. (Charterhouse is the top ranked school over the full 98 years of the competition) Both the semi-final and the final in particular were very tough and required the team to 'dig deep' which they did.



From the left: Henry Featherstone, Stu Mitchell, Sami Bouzabia, James McCormick, Joel Westwell, Adam Wraight, Brodie Good, Abs Ruia, John Dunn-Butler and Cameron Blair





Arriving at Royal St. George's earlier in the week I was asked by a number of people how many of last year's team were playing this year. When I answered 'all ten' most failed to hide their disappointment! But I think there had been a view that we had been a little lucky with the draw last year and once we were put up against some heavyweights like Charterhouse or Tonbridge our young team would find it tougher. And yes, they found it tougher, but they were up to the task. The Secretary of the Halford Hewitt came up to me afterwards to offer congratulations – 'that was a proper Hewitt final'. The rankings get updated every year and Loretto will shoot up into the Top 10.



The wind at Royal St. George's on the Thursday caused all sorts of trouble

The week started at Royal St. George's where first two rounds in the bottom section of the draw were held. Relatively comfortable victories were gained against Merchant Taylor's and Blundells. In fact, in the first round, probably the biggest challenge was the weather; 50mph winds made it a bit of a lottery and it required considerable concentration and stamina to get through the round. Friday, for the second round, was much more benign and the weather over the weekend, when the whole tournament takes place at Deal, was glorious.



James plays from a tricky spot beside the 6<sup>th</sup> green at Royal St. George's – he put it to about 2 feet

Our third-round opponents on Saturday morning were Trent. Records show that we had played them once before but nobody could remember when while their HH record is modest. However, they proved to be more than capable (they had a 20-year-old with a +4 handicap) and will certainly be a team to watch in the future. That victory set up a quarter-final against Charterhouse in the afternoon.

The final score against Charterhouse was 4-1 to Loretto but the match was actually much closer with generally no more than two holes separating the pairs in each match all the way around. In the top match Sami and John Dunn-Butler had to birdie 14,15,16 and 17 just to win 2 and 1. Henry and Brodie birdied 13 and 14 to win the second match on 15. That gave us two wins but behind each match was still very tight; at the time we were 1up in Match 3, 2up in Match 4 and all square in Match 5. Charterhouse were fighting hard and narrowed the gap in Match 3 to just 1up with a birdie at 15 but Abs Ruia and Cameron Blair hit back immediately at 16 and eventually won 2 and 1 to confirm the result.





After 36 holes on Saturday the team were tired and enjoyed a quiet evening at their house watching some other golf tournament in Georgia on the television.

Sunday morning was another glorious day with very little wind though it did get up a little in the afternoon and unlike the Saturday was from the prevailing west. Haileybury had never won the Hewitt but they were a strong team (any team reaching the semi-finals will be strong) and contained a recent two-time winner of the English Seniors Strokeplay as well as the son of Michael Bonallack.



The weather at Deal was much better!

Stu Mitchell and James McCormick led out in Match 1 and put down an early marker with a birdie at 2 and maintained their advantage throughout eventually winning 5 and 4 – not a bad way to dismiss the English Seniors champion and they were two under par in doing so. Henry and Brodie then won Match 3, 3 and 2, so we only needed one more win. Sami and JDB in Match 2 played strong golf on the front 9 and reached 3up but were then subjected to a strong Haileybury fightback. A wonderful pitch from Bonallack on 18 meant Haileybury got the match back to level and they went on to win the 19<sup>th</sup>. Shortly afterwards Adam and



Joel suffered a rare loss in Match 4 so it was down to the final match as the decider. Here Abs and Cameron were 3up with 3 to play but when this became 2up with 2 to play the nerves started to tingle somewhat. They then missed the green on 17 so needed an up and down from a tricky spot to make par, halve the hole and win the match. The putt from Cam was extraordinary, up hill and down dale, but ending within a foot of the pin. With Haileybury not able to make birdie, Loretto were in the final.

Tonbridge had beaten Radley in the first semi-final and were already enjoying their lunch in the clubhouse. The Loretto team and their supporters had only just over an hour for their lunch before the final started. Still, Alastair Lawson decided this was definitely enough time to order a celebratory bottle of claret (for the supporters, not the team you understand).



The Tonbridge team is the most experienced in the competition. Most of the team had 'been there and done that'. 7 finals in the past 20 years and they had won 6 of them. As well as school rankings, the Halford Hewitt calculates player rankings. One of their players had played 126 Hewitt games and was 6<sup>th</sup> in the all-time number of Hewitt matches won. Another two of their players were 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively in the table of best win percentage in Hewitt matches.



For the final it was Brodie and Henry that led the team followed by Abs and Cameron, Adam and Joel, Stu and James with Sami and JDB in the final match. You might enquire how the order of pairings is decided upon. It is up to each Captain to name their pairs 1-5. So, does Adam have a complicated strategy? Does he consult the statistics? No, the truth is that because he has confidence in all five pairings, before each match he makes the draw out of a hat. That shows style.

The front 9 was very tight in all matches. With the wind behind it was playing a little easier and there were a number of birdies from both teams. Our matches 4 and 5 both eagled 7. Going through 12 both teams had made moves and the position was becoming clear; Loretto were ahead in Match 1 and went onto to win it 5 and 4 while Tonbridge were ahead in Match 2 which they went onto win 3 and 2. Tonbridge were 3up in Match 3 and Loretto 5up in Match 5. Match 4 was level. This looked to be the critical match. There followed what was probably the pivotal moment of the match and it was a classic matchplay moment: Loretto hit a good drive on 13 while Tonbridge went into the semi rough on the left. However, from there they hit a magnificent second to about five feet while our second just rolled off the side of the green, some 30 feet from the pin. Advantage Tonbridge. Things were looking grim as we looked to be about to go down in 3 matches. Even if we got up and down for a Par and Tonbridge had a great birdie chance.







James then holes from off the green and suddenly the five-foot putt for Tonbridge looked a lot longer and they missed it. Loretto go 1 up. Then the news got even better; Joel and Adam were clawing their way back in their match; they birdie 15 and get to the 18<sup>th</sup> only one down. What a fightback! And better still; after unexpectedly winning 13, Stu hits a tremendous shot into the long Par 3 14<sup>th</sup> just short of the pin to underscore the advantage and pile the pressure on Tonbridge. It begins to show as they hit into the bunker and twice fail to get out. Suddenly we are 2up and then win 16 to go 3up with 3 to play. Within a period of ten minutes, it had gone from looking bad to looking very promising, especially as we were now 5up in Match 5.

But in matchplay golf there is always a twist; Tonbridge looked rattled after losing 13, 14 and 15 but they were certainly not finished as they won 16 after we drove into a bunker and then made a magnificent birdie at 17. 3 up with 3 to play became just one up with one to play. Now the pressure was on us.

Meanwhile Adam and Joel had won the 18<sup>th</sup> to bring the match back to level and are headed for the 19<sup>th</sup> tee. So now there are two ways of winning. The 18<sup>th</sup> at Deal is a long Par 4, over 400 yards and into what had become a strengthening wind. 4 is a good score. Unfortunately, Stu pushes his drive right into thick rough down the right while Tonbridge find the fairway. I was close to where our ball landed and looked at the lie; it was not good and with a burn across the fairway short of the green I wondered whether James might have to lay up with a short iron. Not far from the ball was the 1<sup>st</sup> tee, where Joel was driving off. It looked OK. We move away to let James contemplate his shot. Tonbridge hit their second from the fairway and the ball falls off the back of the green – a tricky up and down. Maybe a 5 will suffice? James then plays another magnificent shot which just climbs onto the front right side of the green. I didn't think it was possible from there. It's not a certain two putt but it's a putt. Tonbridge then hit a delightful chip from off the back of the green to secure their par. We had two putts for the Hewitt. At the same time Match 3 was on the 1<sup>st</sup> green with both teams just missing birdie putts. Stu's putt on 18 was bang on line but just a little short and it required James to finish the job. How long was the putt? Stu probably would say he was only a couple of feet short; James I think might say it was at least 3 feet! Whatever, he made it and we were able to celebrate. It was tremendous matchplay golf with great nerve shown by our team. Speaking to James afterwards he said that he had never faced the circumstances of a putt like that before and was 'really quite nervous'! I bet he was but again he was up to the challenge to finish off a great week.





James facing the winning putt on 18

This was an extraordinary team effort and I would not single out any one player. What I will do is mention them all in the final match order. Henry and Brodie are a fearsome pairing who nearly always play their best golf when it is needed – in the tight match against Charterhouse, they suddenly birdied 13 and 14 to finish the job. Abs and Cameron are also tough competitors and they showed this in the semi-final when their match became the decider and they had, under great pressure, to get their par on 17 to finish the job. They had also won the deciding match against Charterhouse in the quarter final. Adam and Joel are our most experienced pairing and again know how to get the job done even when not playing their best. The fightback in the final was a tremendous performance and included some great golf with Joel nearly holing his second at the 11<sup>th</sup>. Stu and James played consistently good golf all week and seemed to relish in playing the pivotal role on Sunday afternoon under enormous pressure. Finally, Sami and John Dunn-Butler. In their Saturday morning match against Trent they won all 10 holes – yes, they won 10 and 8 (or 9 and 8 as convention dictates even though Sami had hit his second on 10 to a gimme distance!). Apparently, this score has been achieved 11 times previously in the 97 years of the tournament. But I doubt any pair has ever won 14 holes in succession – they won their last three on Friday afternoon and the 1<sup>st</sup> on Saturday afternoon. Their ability to deliver streaks



of birdies intimidates many of their opponents. A winning Hewitt team requires five good pairings and a strong team spirit which is what Adam has successfully put together over the past three years.

As well as congratulating the team I would like to give a big thank you to all those OLGS members who came down to give support; Craig Cameron, Torquil McInroy, Angus Lindsey-Renton, Ian Mavor, Chris Henderson and Alastair Lawson. They will all join me in saying it was a privilege to watch the quality of golf which this team plays as well as enjoying their company. They know how to play golf and have developed into terrific matchplay golfers. And importantly they enjoy each other's company and have a lot of fun which after all is what golf is meant to be all about.

I attach below the official Halford Hewitt Committee report on the final day.

Next year's Halford Hewitt starts on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> March. I hope to see you there.

Andrew Brown

OLGS President



Team mascot Barney, Adam's brother's dog



## The official Halford Hewitt Committee Report on the final day

*For the second year running the final day belonged to Loretto although it was not a foregone conclusion by any means as they were run close by both Haileybury in the semi-final and again by Tonbridge in the final with games going into extra holes in both matches before the outcome was decided.*

*Both semi-finals were closely contested. Tonbridge eventually overcame Radley 3 1/2 – 1 1/2 in a match where they slowly turned the screw round the “loop” at the far end of the links which left Radley with a lot to do over the last 7 holes and they fell just short. Loretto had an anxious time against Haileybury where Bonallack and Songaila staged a marvellous come-back from 4 down to win at the 19th, however Loretto eventually prevailed.*

*The final produced some high class golf and was too close to call for much of the afternoon. Loretto got away in the top game and were 4 up after 12. On the other hand Tonbridge were three up after 9 in the third game, which eventually proved not to have been as secure as was thought.*

*After a quick Bovril and Sherry at the hut, I decided that game 4 was likely to be decisive and so I followed that one. For once I got it right! All square after 12 holes both tee-shots were solidly down the right half of the fairway at the 13th, Tonbridge hit a fine second shot to about 5ft and Loretto, under pressure, left their shot out to the right in the swale. Normally it can be tricky to get down in two from that swale but Loretto, putting from off the green, managed to hole it! That made the Tonbridge putt look about twice as long as it had done previously and their putt slid by. There were still five holes to go but this felt like a decisive moment, and Tonbridge lost the next two holes as well so it may have had a psychological impact.*

*There they were then, Loretto three up with three to play heading off down the 16th which they lost after bunkering their tee-shot on the left. So two up with two to play and the veteran Hewitt watchers amongst us were exchanging knowing looks. At the 17th Loretto again went left down into rabbit territory among the sand hills. It's a very hard second shot from there even if you draw a decent lie. You have to hit across the protecting sand hill on the left. Anything short gets pushed away to the right and anything other than short scampers through the green off the downslope. Loretto played it well but the ball died on the sand hill about 10 ft from the top. Meanwhile Tonbridge played a marvellous pitch from the centre of the fairway to about 3 ft. Loretto got down in two for a battling four but Tonbridge held their nerve and won the hole with a birdie.*

*Loretto were now only 1 up playing the 18th. Tonbridge played a decent drive steering it down the right hand side, well away from all the trouble on the left. Loretto pushed their drive deep into the rough on the right among the mole-hills. At this point we were wondering whether Tonbridge were about to pull off another Houdini like escape as all the momentum of the game was with them. However Loretto hit a superb shot from the scraggy rough, well over 200 yards to end pin-high just to the right of the green but on the plateau, not below it. A wonderful shot. Tonbridge played their second a little long to the back of the green. I could just say that they both made 4 and the match was Loretto's, however they had to hole from a couple of feet for the match and managed it bravely.*

*The whole final was played in the best of spirits with great camaraderie and sporting conduct between two great teams, one perhaps passing the torch to the other, but making it clear that they won't go gentle into that good night!*