

After a long winter, the 2024 OLGS scratch team season finally got underway at the Stenhouse Quaich. Played on its traditional mid March date, this 2 day foursomes event mixes competitive golf with a fantastic social atmosphere. As always, Elie Golf House Club provided a wonderful venue with quick greens, a cracking pint of Belhaven Best and ice cold Kummel.

Loretto faced stiff competition from five other schools including Merchiston, Edinburgh Academy, Strathallan, Fettes and Glenalmond. Merchiston, in particular, arrived with the majority of their squad set to travel to the ruthlessly competitive Halford Hewitt in April.

Two players made their debut on the Loretto squad. David Atkins' laser guided putting wiped several smiles across the weekend and the Borders man settled in well with the team. Joseph Cookson produced some fantastic golf on his debut, and some legendary exploits off the course too.

As is the Stenhouse Quaich custom, Loretto faced two opponents on Saturday morning. Two victories against Strathallan and Glenalmond kicked off the weekend in style with Torquil McInroy moonlighting alongside Cameron Bouwer to thrash Strathallan by four holes. Three time Halford Hewitt winners, Sami Bouzabia and John Dunn Butler, flaunted their credentials with wins over Glenalmond and Strathallan of six and eight holes, respectively. Victory against Strathallan for Joseph Cookson and triumph over Glenalmond for David Atkins proved that the rookies could hold their own in the Loretto squad.

After a pleasing light lunch, Loretto prepared for a show down with tournament favourites, Merchiston. Following a relaxing morning pouring through the day's newspapers and gorging on an excellent Golf House Club black pudding and sausage roll, Peter MacKay joined Cameron Bouwer for an afternoon tussle with Merchiston's top pair. Despite Cameron Bouwer's sizzling early form with the flat stick, nothing could be done to hold back an in form Merchiston pair who finished two under par in a stiff wind. Despite a brace of two hole victories from Cookson/D.Dunn Butler and Bouzabia/J.Dunn Butler, Merchiston triumphed by six holes overall.

Despite Scotland's narrow Six Nations loss against Ireland in Dublin, nothing could dampen the spirits as the Stenhouse Quaich annual dinner ensued with typical conviviality and hilarity. Loretto held their own in the traditional stand up comedy contest with a tale of Guinness World Records for irregular sized body parts. Don't ask!

Fuelled by the cheer of the previous evening, Loretto came flying out of the blocks on Sunday with a win over Fettes. A refresh of the pairings sent Mike Allen out alongside Peter MacKay, resulting in a one up win against a canny Fettesian pair.

With Merchiston top of the table and facing the unfavoured Strathallan team on Sunday morning, Loretto's hopes of winning the Stenhouse Quaich looked slim. Yet, an enormous upset saw Merchiston licking their wounds after a shock defeat to the Forgandenny based school.

Heading into the final round, victory over Edinburgh Academy would give Loretto a hope of snatching the Stenhouse Quaich. This victory was duly delivered in triumphant fashion and the Loretto squad could only wait.

If Merchiston were to suffer defeat to Glenalmond by a slim margin, Loretto would be champions. Alas, a gutsy performance under pressure was enough for Merchiston to prevail and win the Stenhouse Quaich. Only a difference in holes up would deny Loretto victory.

Finishing joint top with Merchiston's Halford Hewitt squad was a fine achievement for a new look Loretto squad.

Next stop, the Halford Hewitt!