

## **Growing our club Plimmerton's experience**

*Plimmerton (population 2118) is a suburb of the City of Porirua in the Wellington region of the North Island of New Zealand.*

**The following information has been summarised (with permission) from a presentation to Croquet NZ by Kelvin Watson and Tom Berryman of Plimmerton Croquet Club, New Zealand.**

### **Club history**

- 86 years. Initially a single court attached to bowling club. 25 members.
- New 4 court facility in 1994.
- Membership - Mid-50s 2001. Mid-90s 2012. Recruitment now restricted by court capacity.
- GC introduced around 2005.
- Membership now 50% AC/GC in harmonious relationship.
- Mission Statement: All members will enjoy their croquet.

### **Why Is Plimmerton on a roll**

- Both codes are supported and respected.
- Members needs (competitive or social play) are supported and respected.
- Effective session management to ensure player enjoyment.
- Positive internal communication, talking to everyone, questionnaires, players' meetings.
- A culture of enabling rather than restricting.
- Playing a positive role within the wider croquet community.
- We welcome the enthusiasm and ideas of our new members.
- We encourage involvement with other Clubs for information interchange.
- And of course external publicity is crucial.

### **Membership recruitment**

Publicity is the key

- 45% from newspaper items. (Stories not tournament results)
- 25% from personal invites
- 20% from other
- 10% from letterbox drops (lots of work for poor return)

We use:

- Six local papers, Newstalk ZB Community Noticeboard & DomPost Sports
- Local Community Websites
- News releases every month, sometimes 2 or 3.

Important to build news media relationships. And thank them for their coverage.

We've got lots of great ideas for publicity with aggressive recruitment

- Beach and park demonstration picnics.
- Council publicity networks to reach other organisations and "retiring" sports people.
- Mall demonstrations.

### **BUT**

- Courts now close to capacity. Third highest member/lawn ratio in NZ.
- Need to manage player expectations.
- Promotion outside the Club for new members stopped. (Walk-ups only - 8 during Winter.)
- And still they come.

### **Membership induction - evolution**

- 6 lesson format AC-only focus. Poor sign-up. People lost to the Club and the game.
- 6 lesson format AC focus. GC offered to players not coping with AC. Created a 2nd class citizen mind-set. Little Club support for GC. Probably won't stay anyway.
- 2007 Water-shed year. New GC rules. Developed quiz and educated 120 regional players. Used nationally for referee re-qualification.
- 6 lesson format positive to GC. High sign-up rate. AC offered but low interest. Most new people coming as contacts from existing GC players.
- Now a 3 lesson format and 3 socialisation sessions. 100% sign-up. AC offered after 12 months unless really keen.

### **Success brings challenges – playing session management**

- 2001 – Four 3 hour sessions (Summer play and AC only). Winter clubhouse coaching.
- 2012 – Nine 3 hour sessions during summer. 4 AC, 3 GC, 2 shared (mainly GC), some ricochet as well. (Two sessions for interclub, three for court maintenance) (Lots of use outside session times.)
- 2012 – Seven 2 ½ hour sessions during winter season. 3 AC, 4 GC.
- GC sessions often at capacity.

### **Growth of GC – by raising its status**

- Croquet OLE – one-day, two sessions, 6 games, doubles, fun tournament. Different partner each game.
- Easter Tournament – levels in four divisions, 0-3, 4-7, 8-9, 10-12. 16 players in each division.
- In-house coaching programme – building on Jarrod Coutts sessions.
- Continued use of GC rules quiz for education and referee qualifying.

### **Continued support for AC**

- In-house coaching programme – building on Jarrod Coutts sessions.
- Practice routine material.
- Plain language rules documentation for education and umpire qualification.
- AC rules quiz (given success of GC quiz).

### **Where to from here?**

#### **1. Expansion planning**

Ideas being considered

- Additional playing sessions
- Midweek play only memberships
- Modified courts 30 X 24 yards – 5 instead of 4
- Pushing out boundary fence to enable 6 courts
- Leasing additional land for more courts.

#### **2. Achieving a younger membership**

- Club location too remote from colleges for after school involvement.
- No additional weekend daytime court capacity for students or workers.
- Twilight play can potentially kill both birds with the one stone.

#### **College Students Twilight Programme**

- Six colleges in Porirua area plus students who travel to out of area schools.
- Invited to enter teams to a maximum of 32 players
- Split across two twilight sessions per week during daylight saving. Court space for parents to play too.
- Comprehensive lesson plans for coaching, tournament and fun play throughout the programme.
- Parents as active participants in the programme. Student vs parent, student plus parent games.
- Use of Facebook and e-mail for communication purposes.
- Regional play-off tournament March 3.

- Club sponsored prize for successful College team (\$250 donation to College) and sponsored entry fees to National Secondary School Tournament.
- WCA sponsored travel subsidy for teams reaching the National final.

#### For students and parents returning next season

- Family membership subscription rate
- Chance to play an active role in the programme including:
  - Recruitment
  - Coaching & session management
- Opportunity for AC coaching
- Participation in wider competition

#### Regional involvement

Involvement is essential for a healthy Club and a healthy Region:

Offerings to other Clubs

- 170 green fee visitors during winter
- Invitation to our rules/coaching sessions
- GC rules quiz in 3 sessions. Attendees 42 PLM, 34 other clubs. (4 new referees, potentially 3 more next year.)
- AC Umpires course. 4 new umpires & 2 renewals. AC rules quiz in 4 sessions. 24 participants.
- Provision of GC coaching at start-up Club Muritai - located at Eastbourne
- Assisting Wainuiomata to introduce GC – skills refresher sessions, offer of support at “Have-a-Go” and GC lessons.
- Croquet OLE GC fun tournament 48 participants, 50/50 PLM/Visitors
- Creation last year of Easter GC tournament – 48 participants - 21 PLM.

#### Supporting regional activity

- 3 members on WCA Executive Committee
- Extensive involvement in interclub competitions (playing & court facilities).
- WCA representatives. Manawatu Exchange & Lower North Island teams.
- Several interclub tournaments, particularly with Kapiti clubs.

Involvement & contact between ‘ordinary’ members of clubs results in a sharing of ideas, opportunities and concerns.

#### Associations need to be supportive

- Not just regional tournament organisers
- Need to take greater interest in the health of Clubs to avoid Club failure
- Need to facilitate help and support when obviously needed
- Upper Hutt recently closed
  - Investigated possibility of a restart but too late and too hard
  - Earlier involvement may have helped

#### Some interesting NZ statistics

	Population	Members	%age	Courts	Potential @ 20/court
Kapiti Coast	25000	150	0.6%	9	180
Porirua City	52500	95	0.18%	4	80
Lower Hutt –	102000	140	0.14%	13	260
Wellington –	200000	130	0.065%	9	180

- How do your Clubs and Regions stack up?
- What potential do you have for Club expansion and membership growth?
- A member to population percentage of 0.15 to 0.2% could be a target.

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- **To complete the statistics picture: clubs**
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No of members	% of NZ clubs	Participation by code (% of members)		
		AC	GC	Both
20 or less	32	72	23	5
21 – 30	24	61	26	13
31 – 60	30	27	48	25
61 – 80	10	25	42	33
80 +	4		100	

What Clubs in your Region are in the danger zone?

**Available resource material – how can we help each other?**

- Recruitment lesson plans.
- GC & AC quiz questions and answers (cross-referenced to the rules).
- Plain language rules documentation.
- Coaching material.
- Schools programme (information for Colleges, parents and students, lesson plans).
- Croquet OLE spreadsheet. Does the draw & prints game cards showing partner & opponents names, what lawn and what ball colour – easy peasy.
- Copy of our presentation.

All available by e-mail – just ask.

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