

Championship and Silver Meeting Report 2021

To afford us the greatest possible protection against the spread of Covid 19 we decided early in the year to delay playing the Championship until September. Well, the Chelsea Flower Show and the London Marathon were postponed until September so we followed suit.

Formby Ladies came up with a Sunday, Monday & Tuesday at the end of September so we were very fortunate to be able to switch. We had the tee reserved from 08.00 until 15.00 on Sunday 26th for the Silver Meeting. This affords those who work, the same opportunity to play and judging by the record entry this move was much appreciated.

Sadly, with all the problems the Senior golfer has to handle, we did have some call offs. We also had a few players affected by the fuel shortages which started that weekend. This was the first year we had played in 3 balls which meant we coped better with the often last minute changes to the draw.

Although we started with some very early morning mist, as the Sunday progressed the sun shone brightly and there was a mild zephyr asking a few questions of the players. The Formby Ladies course looked resplendent but there was some tough rough and menacing heather lurking to swallow all those errant shots. There were also a few testing pin placements but after all this is our major so you expect to get asked a few questions.

Elaine Clark from Manchester edged out Min Dennison from Hillside on the back 9, with a fine 76 gross, to win the President's prize. Karen Parrott from Formby Ladies' shot a super 69 nett claiming the first handicap prize. Jen Adams from Pleasington, enjoying a resurgence in form because of changing to a new coach, shot 83 - 13 = 70. Elsbeth Pierce also of Formby Ladies' had 80 - 10 = 70. Nicky Settle, another player from the home club, obviously enjoyed the benign conditions. Nicky too shot 70 playing off 15 but this was good enough to pick up the 4th prize and squeeze out Min Dennison on a card playoff. We managed to get everyone finished in the daylight and as the sun set, little did we know the conditions that would greet us for the first round of the matchplay.

Play commenced off the 17th tee at 08.50 on Monday morning but the fairweather fairy was certainly not smiling on all 16 who had qualified for the scratch knockout stages. It had been decided to start the knockout matches from the 17th to make it easy for any games that went into extra time. For the first time in many a year there were no matches needing extra holes - 'best laid plans' and all that.

On their first hole, the wind was whipping straight across from left to right as squally showers turned into horizontal rain. Although there were more anti-slip gloves than players, there were still a high number of provisional balls called into play. Keeping balance on short shots and putts was challenging. To avoid flooding on the greens, the pins had been moved to high points and this, too, added to the demands put upon the players.

Fortunately as the morning progressed the rain eased and some were even seen wearing shorts although that breeze was still testing and gusting. Chris Appleby and Carol Helme, both past champions, lost narrowly in the first round. The leading qualifier's curse struck Elaine Clark as Helen Braddock won on the 17th.

The 4 afternoon matches saw the rain subside, the sun begin to shine but the wind was becoming stronger. Luckily the elevated 11th green held firm and there were no moving balls.

Maybe after lunch the unrelenting conditions or tiredness made us lose Min Dennison, Susan Caton, Michelle Pickup and Helen Braddock.

Fast forward to Tuesday morning for the 2 semi finals but I don't think anyone believed the conditions could be worse than the day before but they most certainly were. Despite the wind and rain some great golf was played. In the top match Sara Fitzgerald from Ormskirk had been powering her way through the field. This was Sara's first Championship but Sharon Eales from Royal Birkdale halted Sara's progress albeit on the last green. They had a see saw game but in these atrocious conditions it was extremely difficult to make a good strike every time. The course was just holding up but now there was a lot of hidden, temporary water. Who was it said golf wasn't fair - he was right!

The second semi final was between recently retired Clare Macleod, Harwood, who hadn't previously made the final and Chris Stokes, Clitheroe. Chris has won the Championship 3 times and was determined to win her 4th title. In a match that could easily have gone the other way, Clare triumphed on the 17th.

The final was set for a 2pm start. Both players now had caddies who were worth their weight in gold because of the conditions. Well done Susan Caton and Carol Helme for stepping up to the plate. Yet again the heavens opened just as Sharon was preparing to tee off. How she managed to keep the ball on the fairway was a miracle but it shows how you must be ready, right from the very first hole, to attack. Unperturbed, Clare planned to use the strong left to right wind to bring her back on to the fairway but something pulled both her first and her provisional ball left. Despite having a crowd of around 20 searching for the ball, it remained hidden so 1 up to Sharon.

The rain was now beginning to affect the greens. 2 of the green staff went ahead of the match with squeegees. Without them, play would have had to be delayed and the light may not have held. The game was close with Sharon going ahead and Clare pegging her back. Opportunities were missed by both players. The rain had stopped but there was still a lot of surface water. This was their 5th game in 3 days and the Championship Salver was glistening from the clubhouse.

Having levelled the match on the 17th tee, an uncharacteristically poor drive by Clare opened the door for her opponent. Sharon grasped the opportunity, plotted her way to the green and went 1 up on the 18th tee. Let me tell you, for those who don't know it, anything an inch or more left of centre when rolling across this green, is destined for the left hand swale. With the wind still blowing from the left, Sharon looked to have threaded her ball with perfection onto the putting surface but despite being tantalisingly close, the contours dragged it left and down the slope. Clare made a good strike but pulled it ever so slightly and amazingly Clare's ball finished a couple of feet from Sharon's. Both opted to putt up the bank and Sharon finished a couple of feet closer than Clare but certainly not dead. Clare stood over her par putt and watched in disbelief as her ball spun round the left side of the hole through 300 degrees, looked as if it was going to drop back in but very sadly, it didn't drop and sat on the lip.

This was a marvellous display of great matchplay golf in horrible conditions from 2 of the best senior ladies in Lancashire. Win or lose they should both take great pride in their performances and celebrate in style but don't avoid the practice ground nor the practice putting green for too long!

It is a testament to the greenstaff at Formby Ladies that the course remained playable when there were others in the County that were closed.

For those interested in statistics 11 of the 15 matchplay games went to the 16th and beyond. This shows how close the standards are and that nobody can rest on their laurels. Add to that an entry of 109 players confirms the LCSLGA is providing the kind of Championship and Silver Meeting that many enjoy. The LCSLGA looks forward to welcoming you again next year at Hesketh Golf Club from the 4th to 6th of May.