

THE ELCHO MATCH 2008

Victory eludes us again --- and not by much!

Tony de Launay's account of the Elcho Match on the NRA website is rather frivolous and superficial, with no serious analysis. He barely mentions Scotland. The match was a terrific one, and for those who value the importance of the event, here is what actually happened seen through Scottish eyes.

We predicted a brisk, rapidly changing north-westerly similar to what we had endured throughout most of the Hopton. It was brisk and rapidly-changing all right, but pretty well straight down the range for much of the time, rather than from the left. The frustrating difficulty of this wind coloured the tempo of the match for all four teams.

On paper we had to be the underdogs this year; England's shooters were much better placed at the top of the Hopton, apart from Mike Baillie-Hamilton's great performance, and the best of the Irish were well up there too. But the Elcho doesn't always work like that. We were soon off to a cracking start at 1000 yards with simultaneous possibles from Jim McAllister and Will Meldrum. The second pair dropped only three points too. All systems were working well, and the coaching team of Alex Henderson and Hamish Hunter with Hugh Butcher in the chair, myself beside him, was on song. Then the Scottish Elcho gremlins that we have worked so hard to eliminate raised their wretched heads once more. A bull on the wrong target from one shooter and loose bedding (probably) from another cost us at least a dozen points and wrecked our 1000 yard score. Ireland led from England by one; we were sixteen points off the pace, and behind Wales by a point too. The other teams assumed, with some justification, that Scotland was out of it.

We were a trifle sombre but not dismayed. I think the difficulty of the conditions helped us to believe that we still had a chance. Sure enough, just like last year, we put in a great shoot at 1100 yards, winning the distance easily, gaining six points on both England and Ireland, and leaving Wales well behind. So we went to lunch with the deficit cut to single figures, and the belief that we could still do it.

At 1200 yards the wind was gusting straight down the range. Close to the line of flags we had a great view. Again our first pair shot splendidly and clawed back four more points from England and Ireland, the latter beginning to produce some very wide shots. Deficit now five; game on! But again the gremlins struck: a low miss this time. No team was dominating, but that miss effectively stopped our challenge. Much has been made of England's dramatic finish to overhaul Ireland by a single point: Pugsley's rapid-fire 74 and Tremlett's 5-bull finish when he needed them all to win. Unnoticed was the performance of our own last pair: a solid 71 from Angus McLeod and a stunningly good 73 from Mike that equalled England's last pair. In fact, even with our miss, we won 1200 yards on Vs to finish just eight behind Ireland and nine from England. Mike's 220 was top of the match. Wales shot a stormer at 1200 too. Poor Ireland were gutted, every one of their shooters dwelling on a single shot that might have won them the match. The final outcome was perverse: England didn't win a single distance and won. We won two distances and came third.

In my final Elcho as Captain it would have been wonderful to finish with a win, but that was not to be. Nevertheless I felt this was a far more positive performance than last year, when we were emphatically out-shot at 1200 yards. Accidents happen in the Elcho and always will do. This year our coaching and quality of shooting was a match for anyone and possibly the best on the day. The team systems and coaching ran like clockwork; the individual Hopton positions counted for nothing. We shall win again when everyone shoots to their potential and no accidents occur.

Thank you, team and all the club, for another great effort that so nearly won the day. I wish my successor, whoever that may be, every possible success in slaying the gremlins and bringing the shield back to Scotland!

Colin Hayes
Captain

Scotland's team:

Coaches:	Hunter	Butcher	Henderson
Shooters:	McAllister Barlow Brown Baillie-Hamilton M.		Meldrum Campbell-Smith A. McEachran McLeod
Plotters:	Kidner		Hossack
Adjutant:	Campbell-Smith J.		
Reserves:	Kidner and Hossack		

Team Scores:

	1000	1100	1200	Total
England	585.65	560.40	547.31	1692.136
Ireland	586.65	560.46	545.29	1691.140
Scotland	570.55	566.39	547.35	1683.129
Wales	571.59	540.35	544.42	1655.136