Yorkshire Union of Golf Clubs. Hon. Secretary's Report 20th March 2019

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was recently reminded that my predecessor's report lasted 47 minutes last year…..and that it received a standing ovation……..on hearing this my competitive nature immediately kicked in!!

You will be pleased to hear that my report should NOT take quite that length of time.

The YORKSHIRE TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

A comment I have heard from golfers, after they have switched to the professional ranks, is that they miss team golf. Sharing success with fellow team members can be a great experience and this is evident from The Yorkshire Team Championships for club teams of 3 players plus supporters.

'The quest to secure The Ilkley Bowl, awarded annually to The Yorkshire Team Champions, began in April last year at Sandburn Hall. An 18 hole 'sprint' first being required to reach the dizzy heights of division seven. Whitby Golf Club, with Alex Wiggins on fire, took pole position in the preliminary round. The score of 70 from Alex being the best score of the day by three and four below the CSS.

At the close of play Chairman of Championships, Alastair Davidson, breathed a huge sigh of relief as the final card was returned below dark skies (as did his new apprentice!!). The course, Sandburn Hall, had been saturated by weeks of rain. So thankfully the 2018 season was underway on time. Little did we know then what was to come once the sunshine returned to bake the fairways almost white!

The first of the seven divisional championships took us to Northcliffe Shipley where that man, Alex Wiggins, once again led the way with a 74 in tough conditions. It was to be the best of the morning scores. However, the 3 man team 36 hole marathon format that is The Team Championship produced a win by Thirsk & Northallerton Golf Club. Their patience and consistent play took them to the top on what was a challenging day of mixed weather. Anyone who has not visited Northcliffe Shipley or experienced the signature 18th hole SHOULD. You can even do so online would you believe?

Meltham Golf Club presents a particular challenge to those used to playing on the level and it was Lindrick who most enjoyed their day out on the undulations that day. Senior County Player Ian Clarke and Sean Needham, the latter out for a walk with a pencil bag and enjoying a cigar, ably supported young Sam Rook who's impressive total of 138 ensured it was a double win (Team and Individual) at the 6th Division Championship for Sam and Team Lindrick. More of Sam Rook later.

We then travelled north for the 5th Division where Oakdale took the spoils at Thirsk & Northallerton on another tough day to golf when the CSS rose to 75 for both rounds. Ian Hutchinson of Teesside GC with a score of 153 good enough to take the low individual prize.

One of my own former clubs, Scarborough South Cliff awaited those promoted at Thirsk along with 12 other good teams. The 4th Division began on a misty day at the seaside but soon became a bright sunny one especially for Waterton Park. They were in contention at lunchtime and, with an afternoon score 9 shots better than any other team, were declared the winners. Meanwhile the Teesside team were making things easy for the officials with scores of 75, 75, 75, 75, 75 and a 74 to be promoted as runners up and win through to play at Garforth.

Scoring in Division 3 was almost as hot as the weather that day! Bottled water all around and perhaps Champagne for Sam Bairstow who bagged a brace of 67's to show the way home with a total score ten strokes less than CSS. But the main prize went to the Team from Shipley with Daniel Thomas leading the line and pushed forward by his team mates when it came to the acceptance speech.

Just 12 strokes separated the 8 top ranked clubs at the end of play. With six going up it was Rudding Park taking the last of the 6 available promotion spots on a countback at the expense of Malton & Norton and Alwoodley. Meanwhile Messrs 'Raybould, Raybould and Raybould' maintained division 3 status for Bridlington. The Family affair continues.

The penultimate Divisional championship was played on the banks of the river Wharfe at Ilkley. Lunchtime leaders Abbeydale owed much to Messrs Brind and Wright (68 and 70 respectively) with young Jack Leversidge returning what was for him a disappointing score of 77. The nature of the man is often determined by the response to the challenge. After lunch a spell on the first tee as starter enabled me to witness the focus and determination of Jack as he set out on his afternoon mission. Clear evidence of his commitment to the Abbeydale cause. Four hours later and following just 68 blows (9 better than the morning) Jack crossed the finishing line to secure the win for Abbeydale as his colleagues fired 70 and 69 respectively to record a comfortable 9 stroke win. Meanwhile after what he himself described as a dull opening round of 70 Alex Fitzpatrick found his touch on the greens and fired a 64 to come out on top individually and help Hallamshire to the runner up spot. As we settled down to watch England take on Croatia in The World Cup Ilkley celebrated securing the last promotion spot to book a place at Rotherham for the Team title decider and a shot at winning The Ilkley Bowl their predecessors had so generously presented to The YUGC almost 125 years beforehand.

The tree lined approach to Rotherham Golf Club never fails to impress and ahead of The Title decider, there was an air of expectation. Huddersfield were keen to defend their title and local lad Sam Haywood, one of Danny Willett's sparring partners was aiming to take The William Rayner Bowl, which is presented to the player returning the lowest individual score, for the third year in a row. Almost ten hours and 108 holes later a single stroke decided first from second and another single stroke second from third place…
Middlesbrough set the target with a total of 426, thanks to a storming finish by James Swash (Squash?) who added a 66 to his opening 70 and so claimed The William Rayner Bowl. Past winners Fulford, represented by Charlie Thornton, James Cass and Damon Coulson had led at lunch but their final score of 425 was one too many as Abbeydale repeated their heroics from Ilkley and earned the right to represent Yorkshire in the National Final at Huddersfield! Abbeydale rightly celebrated their long overdue double success and now proudly fly a flag at their club displaying their 2018 success.

INTER CLUB FOURSOMES
In a different format of team golf fifty six clubs participated in The Yorkshire Inter Club Foursomes Tournament. After six matches (7 rounds of golf) at neutral venues across the county it was Bingley St Ives who emerged victorious defeating Beverley & East Riding in the 36 hole final at Moortown. On a damp autumnal day Beverley set out determined to go one better than when they lost to Ganton at Fulford in extra holes. Bingley St Ives had other ideas and ran out comfortable winners after a determined performance in difficult conditions. A few supporters braved the weather to cheer on both sides with Team Bingley all smiles at close of play when the impressive trophy was presented to them. Beverley will no doubt be back!

INDIVIDUAL CHAMPIONSHIPS
In the individual Championships our Senior golfers contested The Championship for 55 year olds and over on two breezy two days at Hull Golf Club. The holder Mark Lawson of Garforth put up a great defence but the 2017 runner-up, his clubmate and former County Captain Andy King, came out Seniors Champion.

Rod Shimwell from Hessle claimed The Veteran's Championship with two steady rounds of 77 which was a fine total of 154 in what were at best blustery conditions.

In the Under 18 Boys' Championship at Malton & Norton there was a tie between Ben Schmidt and Boys Captain Callum Macfie. With the winner decided on a card count back Ben Schmidt was declared the winner and it signalled the start of what would prove to be a truly special year for him with an extraordinary run of form. Schmidt also took The Neil Hardman Trophy awarded to the player under 16 years of age with the lowest score.

At Malton, for a time at least, it looked like Fulford's Harry Bramley might be in the mix for a prize. He set the early target with a 73 to add to his 75 from the morning and this certainly brought his name to the attention of many who had not previously appreciated the talent of this slightly built young man with a positive attitude and silky putting stroke.

In the Under 16 Boys Championship, played at Knaresborough, young Bramley was now the favourite but, as racegoers know only too well, that does not always guarantee success. However, despite shouldering the expectation of others, he delivered the best score on the day and Harry was crowned U16's Champion. The prize for the leading competitor Under 14 years of age was a familiar name to some as Jack Whaley again put his name on the Richard & Hannah Holgate Salver successfully defending the title, he won at Shipley in 2017.

The Yorkshire Amateur Championship returned to Ganton and attracted a full field of 150 players and almost as many at the reception to honour Keith Dowswell who retired from office on completion of play. Club and county officials, past County Captains and friends travelled many miles to witness the 'end of an era' when Keith finally, after 26 years, to use an equine analogy 'let go the reins'.

On the course some who were first timers, some who were hopeful and some who were on holiday set out to test their golfing skills over one of the most beautiful but challenging of landscapes in the world of golf. As one competitor said at the end of the day 'it seemed like a good idea at the time' referring to when he filed his entry! However, he was back for more the following day! The early pace was set by James Swash of Middlesbrough with a magnificent score of 67 (8 below the CSS that day) closely followed by David Hague on 68 and two scores of 70 the first of which came from a former County Champion of Champions (back in 2000) Adam Frontal. The other from a name mentioned earlier Sam Rook.

Day two proved an even tougher test with nobody able to match the par of 71. A combination of hard ground after a long dry spell of weather and a stiff breeze proved too much for some but not Josh Morton and David Houlding who scored 72 and 73 respectively on another day when CSS was 75. With only a handful of scores in the low 70's it was Sam Rook (70 + 72) who took the Alan Sowden Salver awarded to the player with the lowest score after 36 holes. The Inter District Plate awarded to the district Union from which the two leading scores by players after 36 holes is awarded again went to Sheffield (Rook and Bairstow scoring 287 compared with York's Hague and Thornton whose total was 293).

Forty-one players earned the right to play two rounds on the final day as the cut fell at plus six relative to CSS and it was perhaps just as well that, with 36 holes around Ganton on the final day, almost three quarters of the players were teenagers or twenty somethings. A far cry from what is these days the average age of golf club membership!

With a fine score of 67 Charlie Thornton picked up five strokes or more on every other competitor in round three. A remarkable score 8 strokes below CSS and a sign of how much his golf has improved under the watch of one of our lead coaches Steve Robinson. This fine score catapulted him to the top of the leader-board with 18 holes to play with Messrs Rook, Bairstow and Hague close on his heels but playing some way behind Thornton. News that Charlie had started his final round poorly filtered back and it became apparent that the two Sams (Rook and Bairstow) would be contesting the title.

The pivotal moment came at the 16th hole which requires an accurate drive and then an approach to a generous green guarded by bunkers right and left but more especially by gorse bushes. The popular final round pin position, towards the back of the green, brought the bushes very much into play. Whilst Bairstow had missed the fairway and played three by the time he reached the green he still looked set to pick up at least one or possibly more strokes on Rook whose ball disappeared towards the gorse. However, it was Rook who came away with par!

The ball was found in a gap and somehow, he was able to get a swing and chip onto the green and then hole the putt. Bairstow meanwhile looked on and after missing his putt for par went one further behind. Two pars later Rook was the champion by three strokes but all credit to both players who scored 68 and 70 around Ganton in less than favourable conditions. Their better-ball score of 6 under par for the front nine holes was truly amazing especially given the weather conditions in which they played.

Those who know Ganton well will have heard the Crows that inhabit the plantation of Scots Pines adjacent the spacious practice ground. At close of play it was instead the Rooks (Sam and his family members) who came out on top.

The Yorkshire Match Play Championship at York Golf Club featured several fancied regular county players with perhaps few people even knowing the name Maxwell Berrisford. In 2017 Max lost out to Fitz 'mark 2' (Alex) by 4&3 in the quarter finals – no disgrace there. Max was back again.

Whereas at Hallamshire in 2017 the weather was good in 2018 (at York) it proved to be very different! In round one results went generally to form and so brought about a match between Champion Rook and the aforementioned Maxwell Berrisford from Skipton. A handshake after fifteen holes was followed by Sam Rook's departure for home. With several 'regulars' in the county team also reaching the last 8 it continued to rain! Fulford's James Cass defeated clubmate and close friend Charlie Thornton before then taking care of business with 'leftie' Bairstow to set up a final match with Max Berrisford who came safely through encounters with Josh Morton and Daniel Thomas.
The final 'went the distance' with Cass on the receiving end by one hole as Max Berrisford took the title and proved yet again that in 'head to head' match-play you never know!

County matches.
What would have been the final meeting between Yorkshire and Derbyshire (at Filey in March) ended up a washout with subsequent correspondence received stating that they could no longer continue to play the annual match with Yorkshire which was therefore discontinued.

THE warm up game against Lincolnshire, who are a truly competitive bunch led by former East Riding Union Captain Steve Brattan, took on a new importance requiring our best available team. Away at Elsham a narrow win was achieved with a young team which included Boys Captain Callum Macfie.

The Daily Telegraph League matches involved trips to Ponteland in Northumberland (won 11 – 7), to Silloth on Solway where we met Cumbria (and Won by 9.5 to 8.5) and to Royal Liverpool for the final and match and what was the title decider against Cheshire. At home we played Durham at Hornsea where a large crowd witnessed a thrilling finish when Josh Morton and Lewis Hollingworth produced a vital point and a half to snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat. A very tense affair.
Perhaps the vital win came at The President's home course Fulford, having very nearly ended with a win for Lancashire who led by a point with one game still on the course……somewhere on the course! Lewis Hollingworth found himself up against a very determined and highly experienced competitor who examined every putt, checked every yardage and studied every contour during their game but eventually conceded under Langer's Tree on the 17th hole long after the other matches had been completed. Match result – a DRAW. In cricketing terms, a WINNING draw!!

In the knowledge that Cheshire would be seeking revenge for their narrow defeat in The Big at Wynyard a battleplan was prepared ahead of the match at Hoylake. Captain Darryl, who must have covered every inch of the historic links of Royal Liverpool Golf Club in his Yamaha Chariot, fired up the team who knew that a win against Cheshire would bring home the league title yet again. A resolute team rose to the occasion with a 4 – 2 lead at lunch and with four games still on the course had secured the necessary points. By the end of the day Cheshire had been put to the sword by 13 – 5 and Yorkshire were Champions of The North again.

Seniors

Seniors' Golf in Yorkshire is booming under the Chairmanship of John Grimbleby with the full backing of The Union. The national title won at Goswick in 2017 has sparked even greater interest around Yorkshire and has made for increased competition for places in the team. As a result it has also elevated the quality of golf being played by our team. Despite wins in all but one of their league fixtures the loss to arch rivals Lancashire cost us the title in 2018. A great deal of warm weather training would appear to have been underway since then!..... In the 'Old 6' (the Northern Counties qualifier for The Snr County Finals) it was Lancashire again who made it through to the national finals and indeed completed the double achieved by Yorkshire in the previous year.

Although rarely seen at home Stephen East continues to enjoy success at national level. Richard Jones and Richard Norton both joined East in the Seniors home internationals whilst Stephen again featured in The Senior European Team Championship in Austria.

England Golf Championships

The Northern Counties qualifier for The England Boys County Championship is affectionately known as the 'Little 6'. Pleasington was the venue and what better place than Lancashire to show off the talent of Woodcock's Boys?! With Barclay Brown available despite his busy schedule he signalled White Rose intentions with a first round 67 which was 6 below scratch and 2 better than anyone else all day. Browns total of 140 enabled others in our team to play more tactically and we ran out winners by 17 strokes from Cheshire. With all scores to count it can be a nerve-racking experience and perhaps worthy of mention is the performance of Boys Captain Callum Macfie who got off to a nightmare start but, in the afternoon, improved by 12 on his morning score and regained his self-belief in so doing. It was a terrific result and witnessed by a big turnout for Yorkshire with our supporters outnumbering even the host county. Next up ….The Boys County Finals – at Rockliffe Hall.

The opportunity to compete against Somerset, Lincolnshire and Berks Bucks and Oxon in the north east of England was eagerly anticipated by us. Yorkshire's Coach Craig Fricker and Team Manager Philip Woodcock had done their homework and the logistics and accommodation arrangements were planned like a military manoeuvre. However, the officers in charge had not planned on the appetite of their hand picked 'special forces' Team. By the end of that week I was on first name terms with the staff at Asda in Darlington who thought I was addicted to Jaffa Cakes!

With every player contributing points, and once more White Rose support in abundance, we looked like the favourites and never once did we look like being disappointed. At 12 years of age Josh Berry must surely be one of the youngest boys ever to have competed in The Boys County Finals but you would not have known it. His composure and talented play always looked sure to produce points and with Captain Callum's encouragement and Jack Maxey overturning his opponents after being behind early on in his matches at the top of the order, the team had self-belief in abundance.
Cue celebrations! Yorkshire once again Boys County Champions.

Turning back to Men's Golf. Whilst a great deal of pride is at stake when it comes to league matches it is The English County Champions title that matters most and in 2018 the Northern Counties qualifier, The 'Big 6', took place at Wynyard home of Premier League footballers and possibly the largest fleet of golf buggies in the north east.

A 7,000 yard plus course with a good walk in between holes Wynyard made us very welcome. With 6 of the twelve scores returned by Yorkshire being sub 70 it was Cheshire who pushed us all the way in pursuit of the title. Cheshire finished 12 strokes ahead of third place Northumberland who had prevailed in 2017 but most importantly Yorkshire finished four strokes ahead of Cheshire. The average score for each of our players was almost four strokes better than the scratch of 74. Dan Bradbury and Nick Poppleton would be unable to make The County Finals (one in The USA and the other due to turning Professional) but they were both part of the team that earned us a place at The County Finals at Aldeburgh in Suffolk. Thankfully already in the Treasurer's budget!

Yorkshire supporters regularly outnumber the opposition but it is a long way to Suffolk! However, not only did we take a small bus load of supporters but also a Lancastrian (Michael Yates) who sportingly wore a white rose at the finals and cheered as loudly as anyone else having lost a bet with Neil Hardman whilst at Wynyard for The Big 6.

Special thanks to County Captain, Darryl Berry, for his dedication, enthusiasm and leadership of the team and to Anthony Abraham, the Chairman of Selectors.

Yorkshire is very fortunate to have so many willing volunteers and we are the envy of many other counties who recognise the support we get from club members and appreciate the achievements of our teams and individual players who constantly feature in National Teams at all levels.

The County Members Association continues to flourish with on line entry and payment now embraced by the majority of our members. A range of clothing is growing in popularity and in this, the 125th Anniversary of our Union, competitors will all receive a small gift.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of our County referees there have been 36 Rules seminars conducted at Clubs around the county with almost 2,000 members in attendance. The feedback has been excellent and we continue to receive enquiries from clubs where members want us to visit them.
The 2019 Rules have of course implications for local rules and to date we have collaborated with 40 clubs to ensure that their local rules are 'fit for purpose'. What about the other 145 I wonder!!

Now that we have all mastered the new rules and are wondering what to do FEAR NOT as we have the "World Wide Handicapping System / Scheme" to look forward to!!!! Awareness of this is growing and although unlikely to commence on time in 2020 be assured it is coming! Thankfully the Course Ratings Teams have made excellent progress in Yorkshire where the number of course we have makes for considerable expense! England Golf pay £100 per course to The Union and given the work involved and the distances travelled by our unpaid volunteers this is a hidden cost to The Union and a task with which club members are understandably mostly unaware.

Special golfing mentions must go to Barclay Brown who 'saw off' the best Boy golfers who travelled to Fulford, York and won The English Open Amateur Boys Championship so adding his name to The Carris Trophy.

In the men's equivalent (The Brabazon Trophy) another Yorkshireman claimed top prize as Nick Poppleton was rewarded for his hard work and determination. We wish him success in his new career.

Doncaster golfer Josh Berry, aged just 12 years, registered an International win at the Chantilly International event to become The French U14 Champion. He also featured in The Boys Team that won at Rockliffe Hall and is available for the next five years!

Nearer to home the season ending finale in 2018 at Alwoodley, The North of England Amateur Strokeplay, was claimed by Charlie Thornton (Fulford) following in his close friend's footsteps (David Hague). With The Brabazon Trophy this year coming to Alwoodley let's hope for another Yorkshire win.

Rotherham Golf Club continue to produce county players for us and having won The Yorkshire Boys Championship he earned the right to play at Woodhall Spa in The England Golf Boys Champion of Champions…….which he duly won! He also earned an international Schools Golf cap and was Captain of the team that defeated Scotland.

Howley Hall's Ben Hutchinson continues to improve his game and went all the way at Tour School earning a card which, should he choose to take it up, will give him a good level of playing rights.

England Golf, for all their shortcomings, got it right when recognising the contribution of Les Walker to amateur golf with an award which was widely publicised. Les played 178 County Matches Yorkshire and his observational skills and persuasive powers led to numerous stars of today being selected for teams where Les had influence. He still remains involved with The R&A as a Boys selector.

Thankfully our lead coaches, Graham Walker and Steve Robinson, remain committed to The Yorkshire cause notwithstanding their respective demands from players on Tour and England Squads at International level. We continue to produce players through the Player Pathway and can be optimistic about the future with Philip Woodcock thankfully agreeing to continue his leadership on Boys Golf in Yorkshire.

This is a Walker Cup year and we already have a group of people sufficiently confident of Yorkshire representation to have bought their tickets for Hoylake. Me included.

With Bailey Gill recently called up for a GB&I squad session, David Hague on the road to fitness and Alex Fitzpatrick honing his game across The Pond we have several serious contenders and a few coming up on the rails also.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen I see that 'Golf on The NHS' was recently highlighted in The Press. Why did it take them so long to appreciate the benefits of exercise and fresh air I wonder?

We should all be telling our non golfing friends and especially anyone with children about this competitive sport which combines exercise, life skills and social interaction. It is truly a game for life. The Yorkshire Union are so confident of this that we put our money (well it is your money!) where our mouth is. In 2018 another 14 clubs received grants of between £250 and £500 for initiatives to attract new members or retain existing ones. This brings the total value of grants awarded in the last three years to £15,000 and it will be £20,000 by the end of this year.

It has been my very great pleasure to work alongside Keith Dowswell during the last year and I am delighted that he is now a Vice President of the YUGC. His work and dedication to Yorkshire Golf has been recognised more recently in other ways but more of that later.

I am honoured to have been appointed Honorary Secretary of The YUGC and have thoroughly enjoyed my first year (or half year at least) in office.

Thank you to the members of our Executive Committee for placing their trust in me and for supporting me on a day to day basis with the many responsibilities including those about which Keith never said a word!!!!

With less than three weeks until The Masters and our first County Match against Lincolnshire even sooner better get ready for 2019. You have just heard how quickly a year can pass you by.

Thank you.

Jonathan.L.Plaxton