

## Captain's Report 2025

During my time as vice-captain to Rob, I was very excited at how my role of captain in 2024 would feel. It was a very busy period of planning events for the following year, investigating new potential courses for captain's day, and locations for the annual tour; all (of course) under the very experienced and capable wing of Neil Meixner. Although I've been an EPiC member for a few years, I've mostly attended with a guest and so mixing in and getting to know the other members had always felt limited. As captain, that all changed and it really gave me the confidence and opportunity to get to know people better.

The pressure was on in April, with the first event of the new season being the infamous annual **EPiC v BAGS** match! We had the choice of course and so Ashridge was chosen as a well-played EPiC venue.

Following a weekend of balmy 22 degree weather, a shifting polar jet stream provided us with menacing cold air from the arctic. I was unable to stay for the day, but managed to welcome both teams and enjoy breakfast before joining everyone on the incredibly cold and windy 1<sup>st</sup> tee as play began (Matt Caldecourt even had to buy a woolly hat). A big thanks to Jason Wood again for kindly standing in for me after I had to leave.

In choosing the teams, we were lucky enough to be able to continue the strategy from the previous winning year. The greens were fast and the competition fierce but friendly with the following results: Rob Seeley and David Wannerton narrowly lost on the 18th hole, Steve Davies and Neil Meixner won a tight match 3&2, Digby Hebbard and Chris Sunderland were well beaten by some exceptional play 5&4, Darrell Lewis and Matt Jones trounced the opposition by 7&6, Martyn Howie and Ro Harper won a tight match 2&1, with Jason Wood and Iain Stevenson finally bringing home the victory with a 5&3 win in their match.

The final result was another win over BAGS – 4 matches to 2 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> straight year in a row, maintaining the winning streak set and maintained by Jason and Rob.

A well-deserved celebratory meal was enjoyed afterwards whilst a massive hailstorm ensued outside 'whiting-out' the course, before BAGS Captain, Miles Wilkinson, reluctantly presented the BAGS v EPiC Trophy to Jason Wood again!

The mantle is now passed onto Matthew Jones to secure our victory for a 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row!

Less than a week later we held the first of our regular calendar events on the High Course at Moor Park, with members playing for the **Spring Cup**. This was my first event as captain and so I was quite nervous. After a cold start, we enjoyed some great sunny weather and the course was in tremendous condition considering the bad weather we had endured in the previous few months.

We had a great turnout as usual for this very popular venue, with 44 players taking to the course with varying degrees of success. As usual, Moor Park treated us regally serving us with delicious 2 course dinner enjoyed by all, and through the ball sweep organised by Malcolm and Nick, our attendees generously raised over £400 for the British Heart Foundation.

Congratulations went to Will Evans who won the coveted Spring Cup. He shared a score of 36 points with Digby Hebbard (coming a close 2<sup>nd</sup> on countback), followed by Joel Evans.

After our successful BAGS match in April, as one of our favourite courses, it was back to Ashridge in May for members to play for the **Finlinson Cup**. The weather had improved greatly, and after a buffet lunch, we were treated to beautiful sunshine, with the course in immaculate condition as usual.

Ashridge did not disappoint with their catering and a delicious 3 course dinner was enjoyed by everyone, with lots of banter and stories from the day including Chris Sunderland's 'hole in one' on hole 3 – I remember him tee-ing off and the ball disappearing over a bund onto the green, but none of us realised where it had landed until we got there and couldn't find it – a fantastic shot, and I can still remember his excited reaction when he realised. A big thank you to him generously buying everyone a drink to celebrate!

After dinner, President, Darrell Lewis, thanked everyone for raising another £320 in the ball sweep for the British Heart Foundation. Presentations then followed, with James Barrett receiving the Finlinson Cup.

Again, the winning scores were shared with 3 people (with 37 points) and on countback Ken Adams was particularly disappointed to have narrowly missed out.

For the **Presidents Cup** in June, overcast skies and changeable weather welcomed us at Berkhamsted. This testing course proved a real challenge to most of our 32 players. The promise of no bunkers gave a false sense of security with the semi-rough proving a much tougher opponent to lack of accuracy, resulting in disaster with numerous lost balls and time searching for them in the long grass and thorny gorse. Not surprisingly, in the yellow ball competition only 2 balls came back from the 8 teams!

After the rain joined us for the remaining few holes, we finally got back to the clubhouse and enjoyed the Berkhamsted hospitality with a wholesome 2 course dinner during which the ball sweep netted £320 for the British Heart Foundation.

James Flowerdew and Brendan Conroy won with 38 points in the better-ball competition ahead of 5 teams on 37 points, and congratulations went to Garry Fairbairn who recorded an impressive 35 points (considering the conditions) from Tom Swaysland on 34 points.

Summer had finally arrived for the **Captain's Day** in July which also introduced a new EPiC venue – The Harleyford, one of my local courses near Marlow. The day was magnificent with 27 degree sunshine bathing our 24 players. The course was beautifully kept with the smell of honeysuckle drifting across the fairways.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the course including the feature par 3 hole, although the greens were very fast and tricky with some very interesting/peculiar runs, slopes and rolls, which was reflected in the scores. I managed to birdie 2 holes and bogie 1 and so I was pleased. Unfortunately Jason Ramage hurt his shoulder and had to retire on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

The clubhouse facilities were lovely and after a great 3 course meal, the Captains Cup was presented to Matthew Jones for a score of 35 points, followed closely by Terry Dobbins on 34 points.

Finally in September, the long-awaited tour had come round and I had arranged a different experience with choosing to stay at an all-inclusive resort in exotic **Morocco**. Once settled into the lovely rooms, our first experience of the hotel was the evening entertainment with 'local band', dancing, and acrobats. The quality of the drinks were hit and miss although we did our best to try a range to discover the best ones.

The first day's golf was at **Assoufid** with a unique, naturally undulating desert landscape which I thought was probably the most challenging of the tour. Although warm, the day's cloud cover was very welcome, and with perfect timing – just as our last team finished, a sandstorm hit (they only have 1 or 2 a year). Gavin Travica won the money on the day with 37 points (4 others joined him but lost out on countback).

It was onto **Al Maaden** for the 2<sup>nd</sup> day – a very wide, open course with unique rectangular pools, sculptures, and a square green on hole 12. Geoff Green streaked ahead with a win on the day of 45 points (with Garry Fairbairn following on 42). Hotel entertainment for the evening was Karaoke, with the longest version of Hey Jude ever, and a few going out to experience the local culture, with Rob Seeley returning with a Rolex!

Finally, day 3 saw us at **Royal Marrakech** with its exceptionally lush, manicured gardens and colonial style clubhouse. The sun was shining, and the deer were roaming – we even rescued a frog from down the pin hole on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Although the course was a bit repetitive, it challenged us to hit straight (Joel lost 4 balls on the front 9). Neil Blundy stole the day on a very respectable 40 points.

Over the weekend we had some very impressive scores with 3 over 40 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, and 14 over 36 overall. I'm proud to say that the Captain's team emerged as clear winners of the match play.....8-0 after 2 days! The tour winner was Neil Blundy, with the Green Jacket presented by last years' winner Oliver Tobin, who came a close 2<sup>nd</sup> with only 3 points difference.

Arranging a tour is quite a challenge, and it was tough to keep everyone happy (especially with the lower number of attendees which proved tricky with the team selections on the last day). Hopefully everyone appreciated the difficulties, and I'd like to thank all the 2024 tourists for being a great bunch. A special thank you to last year's Captain, Rob Seeley, for his assistance.

October saw us return to Sandy Lodge for the **Autumn Cup** and we had an early start for a change. The course was in great condition with the ugly weather just about clearing up before the first tee-off at 9 am. I managed to find the bunkers a lot and we all managed to putt badly. Matthew Caldecourt had a nightmare in the thorns on the 7<sup>th</sup> hole, and I cut my leg trying to help him, then Gavin Tuck's fingers went numb (just before I played his ball accidentally).

Apart from a chilly start and slight shower half way through, the afternoon finished in glorious sunshine and we all sat outside afterwards for a beer. The early start meant that all 40 players were back in time to enjoy a late lunch and have the prize giving, with some even managing to get home before dark! Well done to Darrell Lewis who took the cup with an impressive 43 points.

The final event of the year at Letchworth on the 30<sup>th</sup> Dec was for the **Recessionary Bowl**. Unfortunately (being away for the festive period), I was unable to join the 31 EPiC members, friends and family to enjoy what was apparently a splendid day's golf, on a chilly but bright day.

After the warming 2 course meal, a trophy was presented to Chris Sunderland for his hole in one at Ashridge – as only the 4<sup>th</sup> member to get a hole in one in the 47 year history of the society. The EPiC Recessionary Bowl winner was Geoff Green with a score of 35 points (from next best at 32).

In the final of the **Knock-out Competition**, it came down to the last two holes at Frinton-on-Sea with Neil Meixner securing a half to cement a 2&1 victory over Oliver Tobin (the defending champion). Oliver has kindly offered to manage the competition for 2025 again.

I'm very proud to have been your Captain for 2024, and thank the committee for their confidence in asking me. I've really enjoyed the experience and opportunity to get to know more of you. It's bitter-sweet now that my captaincy has come to an end, but I'm looking forward to enjoying the society events with a newly gained confidence and familiarity with the members.

Good luck to Matt Jones as your new Captain – it will fly past and so enjoy the experience; and Chris Sunderland, as vice-captain, enjoy 2025 and preparing for your captaincy in 2026. I'm sure you will both do really well and receive huge support from the committee and members.

Neil, it goes without saying and has also been said numerous times, but THANK YOU. For all your wisdom, assistance and support. I hope that as part on the committee I can help support you over the next few years to make your job a bit easier.

Thank you all again for your kindness and support, and I look forward to seeing you all at event this year.