

BH Middleton Cup Manager Report 2021

Over all the season can be viewed a successful year, without delivering a trophy which whilst disappointing the progress made was very pleasing to see.

The Middleton Cup (MC) was changed by Bowls England (BE) to a knockout competition for the season 2021 and whilst disappointing it at least allowed for a competition to be held during a shorter season. A first round win against Isle of Wight was followed by defeat to a strong Kent side, that said the performance was disappointing on many fronts and certainly left some questions that need to be answered to ensure we don't see a repeat in 2022.

It had been anticipated that the MC would return a league format in 2022, but BE have indicated that this will remain in a knockout format. Bowls Hampshire along with many other counties have made representation in relation to this decision requesting that it return to a league format. We will see what the outcome is

Whilst we had the disappointment of the MC the mood was lifted by a very strong performance in the Balcomb Trophy which saw us go all the way to the final before losing to Northants. The road to the final was a tough one but without doubt the four games played on the journey to the final where some of the finest performances I have witnessed in 30 odd years of being involved in bowls at this level and great credit should go to the 10 players who formed this squad

The 2021 season saw Hampshire competing in the Home Counties League (HCL) for the first time and was planned to form the trial process in the early part of the season, COVID put place to that. However, a knock out competition was organised and wins against Middlesex and Surrey saw Hampshire reach the final before losing to a strong Sussex in a very competitive match. From a selection perspective it was very pleasing to see the performance of players who hadn't previously played at this level joining forces with experienced MC players and certainly in many cases making a strong case to be included in the MC squad next year.

In summary there were far more positives than negatives to take from the first year of our joint manager term, that said we have already started to review this season identify the lessons to be learnt and look forward to 2022.

Finally, many thanks to the Officers and spectators who supported the team but most importantly to every single player who represented Bowls Hampshire during the summer and remember it is honour to wear the BH shirt not a given

Paul May and Richard Shelley