THE TALK OF THE TERRAIN

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They've only gone and done it!



The Home Nations trophy has been in England's possession for nearly a quarter of a century. Not anymore. Team Jersey finally prised the trophy from England's grasp in an exciting two days of top-level competition over the weekend. England had won the trophy every year since the event began in 2000 at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. Tony Smith, the President of the Welsh Pétanque Association, was there that day. Speaking after the prize-giving ceremony following the end of play yesterday he said that he doubted then whether they would ever see the day when England would lose the competition. Of course, Jersey weren't there that day, having only been invited to take part in the competition for the first time in 2016. They ran England close when the event was first staged in the Island in 2018 and have been runners-up in the last five years. Even Dave Ibitson, the Pétanque Jersey chairman, had his doubts: "We said we could win it. I'm not just sure that we ever believed it."

The actual trophy arrived in Jersey a bit battered – it had lost one of its handles in transit. John Edmondson, England's Head of Delegation, asked for it to be repaired whilst it was in Jersey's keeping – "because you're only borrowing it," clearly laying down a marker for next year's event in Wales. Dave Ibitson said that for him, as non-playing captain, it had been the most nail-biting day he'd ever had, especially as England began to whittle away the Islanders' early lead.

Before play commenced each team entered the arena with Montfort Tadier playing music on his accordion appropriate to each of the nations involved. Ken Vibert then gave a welcome speech in Jerriais followed by Dave Ibitson greeting everybody in English, just in case any of the visitors weren't familiar with the native tongue. After that Monty played the Jersey unofficial National Anthem "Beautiful Jersey"

The rain didn't stop Jersey starting with a bang, winning every match against Wales while England were facing stiffer competition from Scotland, losing three of the eight matches. Jersey found the Scots tough opposition in the second round, only winning four matches, but Wales put up a fight against England, managing to win one game, giving Jersey a slender lead over England. However then came the clash between the top two and Jersey came out on top by a 5-3 margin, meaning they went into lunch with a three point lead.

In the afternoon session Wales suffered another 8-nil pasting at the hands of Jersey while England were dropping three points against Scotland. Jersey followed up with a brilliant 7-1 win against Scotland while England really struggled against Wales, losing three matches. A four-all draw against England meant that Jersey ended the day with a commanding six point lead.

But it was only half-time. Could Jersey hold on? Thinking back to 2018 it was the second day when Jersey came unstuck. Day 2 dawned. With sun now shining, the wobble didn't really begin until after lunch. After their success against Wales on the opening day, Jersey could only manage a 5-3 win this time, but England failed to take advantage, only managing the same scoreline against Scotland.

It was even-steven in Round 2 as well, both England and Jersey pulling off 6-2 wins. Then the crucial morning encounter between the two leadership rivals – and Jersey looked to have just about sealed the deal with a 5-3 win. But you can never count your chickens. England nicked a point back in each of the first two afternoon sessions, beating both Scotland and Wales 6-2 while Jersey only managed 5-3 wins against both the also-rans. In truth England needed a whitewash in the final session against Jersey to upset the Jersey applecart, and they started with a vengeance, reeling off the wins.

But two Jersey teams were having none of it. There was a huge cheer when Jersey 2, Matt Pinel, James Rondel and John Lane beat England 2, 13-4 and then Jersey 6 – Katrina Holden, Andy Limbrick and Gary Cowburn - beat England 4 by the same margin to seal the deal. A lot of hugging and cheering followed. Jersey had beaten England by 64 wins to 62, with Scotland third on 40 wins and Wales in fourth place on 20 wins.

The eight Jersey teams had been tasked with winning at least of eight of their twelve games to give the Island a realistic chance of winning the trophy. And in the in the end, none of them managed less than six – with two of them managing a fantastic ten out of twelve, but if you think about it, 64 wins by eight teams averages out at what was required. The afore-mentioned Jersey 2 emerged as the top Island team on points difference over Jersey 8 – Ross Churchill, Joy and Derek Hart, but in truth all the Jersey trios put in superb performances. For the record, they were bested by England 1 who managed 11 wins.

There are many others in the supporting cast who deserve a mention – the three umpires, Judy Dove, Elaine Paisnel and Richard Sowerby all put in a shift. The scores on the doors were maintained with seemingly effortless efficiency by Steve Foster and Dawn Buckley. And mention should be made of what went beforehand including the excellent training and selection process – some had doubts about being teamed up with partners they were unused to playing with, but the results speak for themselves.

Which brings us finally to the Pétanque Jersey chairman, Dave Ibitson, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes and upfront in helping Jersey to achieve this historic win. He was the driving force behind using the Liberation terrains to showpiece our sport and in persuading sponsors to come on board, including the Jersey Development Company. Oh, and his family, all stayed behind after the event to help with the clear-up. Will there be an open top bus celebration to celebrate the triumph? Somehow that seems doubtful!



What a great setting for the event – all three visiting nations said how brilliant the venue had been. And Liberation Pétanque Club were commended for their role in helping put on a great show





Top Jersey team



Katrina Holden



Matt Pinel



Gavin Scott



Ross Churchill



Joy Hart



John Lane



James Rondel



Ross Payne



Derek Hart



The teams taking part in the 2024 Home Nations



Well done the umpires – Elaine Paisnel and Judy Dove, not forgetting Richard Sowerby



Nice to see the MacRomerils, even in those shirts



The celebrations begin



The one-armed trophy



Lucky ducky: Jersey 2's mascot



The breakfast of champions