

Annual report - 2022

The committee of Ards Blair Mayne Pickleball Club are pleased to submit their report and accounts for the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022.

Chair's annual report on behalf of the committee

I took over the Chairperson role from Sheelagh Foy when personal circumstances took her to live in Spain. Taking over at this time was difficult, the COVID pandemic was still a major issue and getting back to play safely was a challenge. Folk had really had enough of the restrictions but safety was our main concern and as the club COVID Officer I regularly issued COVID reminders.

Luckily I had the backing and support of a great committee; Siobhan, Hannah, Miles, Kerry and Bridget. Each had their own special skill set which has been utilised with a large slice of enthusiasm to make our club into the success we have become.

Our meteoric growth gave us a series of challenging and problematic issues to address throughout this year.

The grading issue was a running theme - how do we deal with players of varying standards wanting competitive play and social play - so difficult, but we rolled with the blows/ comments and have tried to offer appropriate organised play with appropriate court time to the various types of players. To date we have succeeded shown by the numbers of attendees at every club session run.

To help us achieve this we sought additional court time outside of our main base of Ards Blair Mayne given the lack of additional availability in the centre. Regent House school was trialled during the summer of 2022, we later moved to Movilla High School and established contacts with Comber LC too. Alongside our increased court time the committee recognised a need to improve general pickleball standards by offering coaching to various playing levels - beginners/improvers has been very successful. This self-help/self-taught facility is impressive considering our new young sport lacks a local/ national governing body who would normally organise and supply coaching, and fully qualified local coaches are not currently an option.

Hannah has continued to research our options with grading methodology and has refined our approach with graded league play monthly at our Saturday session to allow players of similar ability to play each other in a competitive manner.

Growing numbers is both a great reflection on our club and a headache for organisers of sessions. The committee have trialled numerous solutions to limit the adverse effect of excess numbers at sessions. In January 2022 the average attendance at our sessions was 20, this has now grown to a capped 32.

The playing App SPOND was researched by Hannah and is now utilised to offer appropriate sessions, location, play structure to all members. Again this has been a major successful innovation.

One such grant of £1,350 has enabled us to purchase a ball machine, offer training to players, three sets of new nets (available to members for private play) and a lot of new balls.

2022 was the Club's first year of full play without pandemic restrictions closing the facilities used to enable sessions. The Committee understood members needed constant information and a club Newsletter was established.

The club also carried out “outreach” work around the Province to encourage the growth of pickleball. Many groups and associations have benefitted from our helping hand - Larne, Falls Rd Women’s Group, BB Movilla and GBNI.

With so few pickleball clubs in NI most outside organised play were friendly affairs and great friends and contacts have been made in Lisburn/Larne. Further afield the great COVID spreader event, The Scottish Open in Glasgow went well (apart from the COVID) and further competitive trips to the Irish Nationals/Open are planned in 2023.

Throughout 2022 social events were an important and regular feature of the annual calendar. Highlights included;

- BBQ at the McAdam Farm
- Christmas Charity Film Show (£400+ to our member centric charities)
- Christmas Lunch/music/drinks

Thanks to Kerry for organising and supplying Tesco Freebies.

We continue to improve our pickleball equipment and cultivate relationships with the ABM management. Provision of court dividers, extra seating and curtain lifting have gone a long way to enhance our playing conditions.

The club corporate image was also addressed during the year with our club badge now appearing on an array of items such as t shirts, hoodies, caps and hats. Both locally and internationally these items have helped Ards Blair Mayne Pickleball Club be recognised as a leading club and increase awareness of our sport.

Coming up to date in 2023, our sessions can now be paid by cash, card and now pre-paid cards - this is a great benefit to our members and ensures session progress slickly.

Our recent club tournament was an unqualified success evidencing a clear and obvious rise in the standards of play throughout the club. It would be very poor of me, not to mention the ultimate winners of the advanced level tournament, Gracie and Harry Hamilton who exhibited a magnificent standard of play sweeping all before them. Our club trophies are the envy of all other clubs, their innovative design and the use of broken pickleballs makes them a valuable addition to players. A great environmental initiative by Miles, with the bonus of bringing 2 back home as winner of the intermediate level tournament alongside his wife and playing partner Stephanie.

2022 was a significant year for our club establishment and growth and as we look to the next phase of the club over the incoming year I would like to highlight the main reason for our success, the love of the sport. All those that help run the club in the background, at sessions, supporting events etc thank you for your effort and determination. As an organisation solely run by volunteers - when we first attended we only came to play but we now operate probably the largest Pickleball club in Ireland with over 100 members – we can be proud of our achievements to date and I look forward to seeing the club continue to flourish.

Matt Bishop

Chairman