

50 Years Zuoz Fives Club Zürich

A weekend in Zuoz - September 6-8, 2013

Report by Grant Williams

Leaving the third world depravity that we English know as Luton Airport and arriving at the spotless modernism of Zurich is a journey in itself. Switzerland immediately reminds us that politeness need not be a virtue, that cleanliness should be a standard and that we all need to work a lot harder to be able to afford to live there.

The English contingent making their way by various means to Zuoz aged from 20ish to 70ish and some. Twenty five souls in search of the European (sorry Mr Cox) Mecca of fives. Our journey takes us over mountains encountering The Von Trapps and through tunnels eventually arriving in the majestic Engadine valley peppered with chocolate box villages fit for a Christmas Selection tin.



The first meetings were in the square between The Klarer (Still run by the gorgeous Rita, the focus of schoolboy crushes in the 1980s and still the crushes of matured schoolboys in the 2013s!) and The Crucsh Alva, old friends gathering for some in familiar surroundings, for others somewhere new and exciting. Regardless of familiarity, Zuoz immediately makes everyone welcome. There is something solid and comfortable about this little village perched on a Swiss mountain, dependable, welcoming and yummy much like the strudel in The Klarer.

The weekend went off to a flying start with “Cheers for Beers” in the bar of The Engiadine Hotel. Herr Haering with his usual aplomb gathering everyone together for an informal drink and dinner. This was a wonderful evening where old acquaintances were renewed and new friends introduced. Surprisingly the speeches were relatively brief with Daniel in particular keeping it comfortably below the half hour mark although it was littered with references to Grant Williams’s 50th birthday. After a good few hours those with only a little experience of drinking at altitude retired for the night whilst those with form pushed on to The Dorta and other establishments. It is quite possible that the extraordinarily sunny day with temperatures around 28 degrees in Zurich and similar in Zuoz may have also taken their toll when combined with beers and wine.

Saturday morning saw leisurely activity. A number of crocodile processions at varying times drifted down to the cricket fields to watch the Old Boys vs the School annual cricket match. This was hugely entertaining for the English contingent who having rejoiced at thrashing the Aussies was now treated to cricket a la Zuoz, a variation of the game we traditionally enjoy in England.

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How we enjoyed watching three gulleys' simultaneously throw themselves at a stationary ball and then applaud one another for stopping the ground swallowing said ball. I particularly enjoyed one school batsmen in the third eleven taking his guard a foot outside leg giving himself plenty of room to attack the drive, unfortunately the opposition had clearly nailed his shoes to the pitch so that he couldn't move. With an unguarded wicket it was inevitable that he should eventually be bowled 7 overs later.



We were fortunate enough to be the invited guests of the Old Boys Fives Club and were all provided with a most excellent lunch. Our brochettes doubled up as duelling swords. The return of the Three Musketeers of 1961 looked quite the part with a bun on top of a foot of grilled meat.

After a long day in the sun we all returned to our respective hotels to prepare for the evening but not before checking out the Old Boys car lot on the way through. Somebody remarked they could be sold at auction and clear the UK national debt. It would be a nice offer and one that Messrs Cameron and Osborne would warmly appreciate.

At 7 o'clock we gathered at The Rondell outside the Lyceum for a glass of fizz and prize giving. I think we were all touched at the nod to British humour and self-deprecation that the staff and pupils of the Lyceum enjoy. The most touching of course was the establishment of the Benny Oei trophy. For those of you who knew Benny and Marianne you will have been moved by the words of warmth expounded by the Director of Sports, for those of you who never met Benny imagine your favourite Uncle, Jonners and the way you would like everyone to remember you wrapped up in one.



Dinner was served in the dining hall of the Lyceum and was particularly yummy, the menu a reflection of local gastronomy and a Swiss treat. The pastry chef really pushed the boat out with desserts and gave Daniel the chance during one of his four speeches of the evening to remind everyone again that it was Mr Williams birthday, not to mention that shirt. The Fives Club cake was usurped for a photo opportunity. Did everyone in the Dining Hall get a chance to speak that evening? Almost everyone. Ronald gave an excellent reply from the EFA although at one stage we did think he was going to detail the balance sheet line by line.

The school Director passed over his address to two students in English and German, I think we all particularly enjoyed the speech in German from the chap in the open pink shirt. His notes looked a little disconcerting but it transpired there were only a couple of dozen words on each of the 56 pages.

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There was talk of nightcaps in The Engadina, a few of the Brits made it but surely in the back of everyone's mind was the big Tournament, the centrepiece of the European extravaganza and for some, the ultimate trip down memory lane.



Who heard the bells at 3 o'clock? Lying awake in anticipation, the rain falling on the pantiles reminding us how quickly things can change in the mountains.

Sunday morning. Breakfast more subdued than usual as sports clad players topped up on carbs (well bread, jam and cheese) before making their way up to the Lyceum for the 9.30 prompt!! Start that Daniel Haering had insisted upon the previous evening during speech one and again in speech four.

I for one felt very guilty rolling up at 9.40 to find myself alone only to find everyone gathering in the reception hall where Daniel was putting the finishing touches to the draw. Finishing touches may be a bit dramatic. Two rather well made and artistically creative boards sat astride the staircase. The thing that was most noticeable was an absence of any writing on them!! Half an hour after the competition start time we started working on the parings.

It is always amazing how on the day of a competition some previously quiet and timid characters are filled with gusto, bravery and foolhardiness and want to join the main competition whilst others feeling the effect of too much Rioja opt to play a gentler competition. After a roll call to determine who was actually in attendance, we had to tinker with Daniel's beautifully designed draw and scoreboard (modelled on windows Office Excel package 2012) to accommodate yet more entrants! With 24 in both the main tournament and the festival, a record entry!



The first ball was probably served about 10.45 which in the great scheme of things wasn't too bad. A moment's pause to reflect on the spectacular backdrop that is endemic to Zuoz. We may all wax lyrical about the view from the back of the courts at Eton overlooking the entrance to the swimming pool and the loos or even the panorama at the back of the Iffley Road courts where the bins are kept but to look out of the courts in the Engadine at mountains carved out of time as one pops it in the pot, we are indeed blessed.



The two competitions ran concurrently throughout the day with the usual highs and lows. Great fun was had by all. There was a real sense of competition but equally that Zuoz tradition of fair play even at the cost of winning (which might explain a lot!....only joking!) remained a constant. Eton Fives may be a purist game but the lack of referee and the nature of the way the ball is struck offer many opportunities for us to show our character one way or the other. If there is a common thread that runs through our little band of fives players it is that

understanding of fair play and the fact that we cheat no-one but ourselves and that we must respect the integrity of others. The ZuoZ Old Boys are fine proponents of everything that is exemplary of our precious genteel game.

In the Main tournament, there were many ups and down during the day not least because the courts had no roof and it was raining which introduced a whole new dimension. Amazingly given the level of competitiveness nobody was injured (apart from Karen Hird aggravating an old injury....REST IT) which kept the bookies happy as there was a lot of money riding on Herr Haering adding to his extensive injury list.



(Chris eyeing up the trophy, Ron eyeing up lunch)

11th Engadin Challenge Cup

Final:

Matthew Wisemann/Michael Kuehnburg versus Chris Morris/Ronald Pattison
(won by Wisemann/Kuehnburg)

Semi-finals:

Matthew Wisemann/Michael Kuehnburg versus Emily Scoones/Grant Williams

Chris Morris/Ronald Pattison versus Martin Powell/Renato Buechi

Festival:

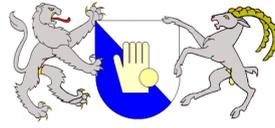
Mark Jacobs/Peter Suess versus James Fredenham/Dieter Büchi
(won by Jacobs/Suess)

Semi-Finals:

Mark Jacobs/Peter Suess versus Danny Hewitt/Isabelle Sommer

James Fredenham/Dieter Buechi versus David Cooper/Franz von Feilitzsch

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Prizegiving and cake was taken back in the hall of the Lyceum where Daniel delivered another beautifully prepared speech keeping it comfortably below 25 minutes and receiving genuinely warm applause for doing so. He had only one more opportunity to get his weekend tally up to double figures and a cumulative 3 hours to win him the Honour D'Or from the institute of waffle.

For some, beers were taken in the Crusch Alva and some general back slapping for the days endeavours. We rendezvoused as a collective at The Walther later that evening for a fantastic pizza fest at one long table. This was great fun, lots of banter, great food, great company and everyone enjoying a healthy glow from the day's activities and too much wine. It was wonderful all being together, wives and partners (who made the weekend far more glamorous) and without exception a good time was had by all.



All in all it was a perfect weekend. On behalf of the English contingent a massive thank you to Daniel Haering and especially to Seraina Haering who like a swan paddles away furiously propelling the enigmatic and serene Daniel in the right direction effortlessly.



New friendships were formed and old friendships re-kindled and galvanised. It is always a pleasure to visit Zuoz and to have been invited as guests of The Old Boys Club was an honour for us all. When some old wag coined the phrase "It's not the winning but the taking part that counts" it may well have been on the train back from Zuoz some time ago.

