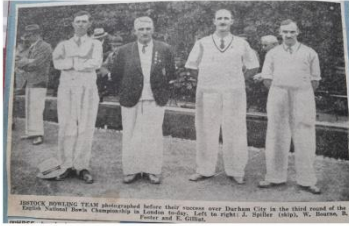


Ibstock Bowls best ever team?

The 2022 bowls season was a great season, but was it their most successful in the 93 years that the club have been bowling on the Welfare site on Leicester Road, in Ibstock?



Perhaps that accolade should go to the 1936 quartet of Ibstock bowlers, comprising J. Spiller (skip), W. Bourne, R Foster and E. Gilliat. This quartet entered the county fours, winning the county tournament and the right to represent Leicestershire in the finals of the 'All England Bowls Championships'.

In those days, Leamington Spa was not the home of the England Bowls Association, so the team had to travel to Denmark Hill (Camberwell), in London for the finals. The green was still a centre of excellence in that the 1934 British Empire games were played here.

Their first match could not have been harder in that they were drawn against Leamington Avenue, previous years beaten finalists, in the preliminary round. The match was a close affair but Ibstock eventually triumphed by a single shot.

First round opponents were 'Tally Ho', a team from Birmingham, who they defeated decisively by 20-13. Buoyed by their success, and beginning to believe in themselves, they despatched their second round opponents, Windsor & Eton, in short thrift by 20-8.

The quarter finals, played the following day in heavy rain, saw a match against Durham City. The match was a close affair and a measure was needed on each of the first two ends, to determine shot. After 5 ends, Ibstock were leading 4-3, but gradually exerted their authority to move away from their opponents, to eventually win by 9 shots. Skip J. Spiller played a brilliant game throughout and one end drew shot, to deprive his opponents of the seven shots they were holding at the time!



Their semi final opponents were Boscombe Cliff, who started their match strongly, going into a 5 shot lead after 7 ends. However, brilliant play from J Spiller (again) on the 8th end helped pull 5 shots back to level the score at 7 apiece. On the 9th end, Boscombe again exerted their authority and were holding a significant number of shots, until J Spiller stepped up and destroyed the head with a strong drive, leaving Boscombe to draw a measley one shot to lead 8-7. The 10th end followed a similar pattern, with Boscombe establishing a scoring head in their favour, until J Spiller stepped up to take the jack back and score three shots to Ibstock, putting Ibstock 10-7 ahead.

Sadly, reports of what happened from end 10 onwards do not seem to have survived, but suffice it to say the final was not contested by Ibstock, and Boscombe went on to win the trophy against Parson Green.

Nevertheless, the achievement of reaching the semi-final of a national competition is amazing, considering the team had barely been playing together on the Ibstock Green for 8 years. Little is known about the players, except to say that J Spiller was a manager of a bank in Measham, although the three other team mates were miners.

If anyone knows of any further history of these men, then please email the club secretary at andytonkin55@gmail.com. Alternatively, if you are interested in taking up lawn bowls as a sport then also contact the secretary on the same email address.