

This Year's Autumn International at Grafham was Pressure On!!..

## **Not an England Gold for 3 Years! Could England Captain Ed Foster and Richard Slater Team Manager turn the Tide??**

After making the England team in 2009 and 2010, it was of no little disappointment when in 2010, I failed even to get to the National Final. It was of little surprise therefore when I 'volunteered' my services as England Team Manager for the Grafham Autumn International that some of the more sympathetic members of the team welcomed me to the post with the slightly amended old adage that, 'Those who can, fish. Those that can't, manage!'

That really was the start of many months of very hard work, a certain amount of stress, a good number of new friends, much exchanged banter, and the sheer unadulterated elation of the triumph for the England team on Friday 23rd September 2011.

At the end of 2010, the Confederation of English Fly Fishers (CEFF – the organisational body of English international competitive fly fishing) voted itself out of existence in order to start afresh under the auspices of Team England Fly Fishing (TEFF), part of the unified voice for angling, the Angling Trust.

At the same time, the Loch-style manager resigned, leaving TEFF with an urgent vacancy to fill. As much as I would have loved to take on the role on a full time basis, the time commitment was too much for me, but I did volunteer to manage the home match, to be held on Grafham, which over the past couple of years has become effectively my home water. With John Horsey agreeing to manage the team that was sent to Orkney in Spring, my offer was accepted, and so began a very swift learning curve.

While I knew many of the team, there were some who were only names on paper for me, so I had to get to know those people, as well as selecting a hotel who would be able to host the four teams for the week of the International, and liaising with the fishery and staff to make arrangements for the match.

Although I had almost eight months to prepare for it, and was thinking each week of things that needed doing, eventually, the final few weeks in the run up to the match came, and to say life was hectic would be an understatement.

One of the most pleasurable tasks I had to do was to pick a captain for the team.

There were a number of possible candidates. Tradition dictates that the post is filled by an individual with a number of caps, and when I narrowed the list down to the final couple, it was with huge delight that I was able to ask fellow club member and 'Team Froghair' team mate, Ed Foster to take on the role. It was to be his fifth cap, and immediately followed his fourth in 2010.

When that was considered alongside his proximity to Grafham, and the local knowledge he could bring to the role, I knew he would be the ideal man for the job. It turned out to be the perfect choice.

The English National Final was held on Grafham three weeks in advance of the International, and a number of the English team were also competing in the National. This meant that through August and into the first week of September, we were competing against each other with the secrecy that comes with that. But as soon as the National was over, we were all on the same side, and the information that flowed from everyone's advance trips to the water proved to be invaluable.

Lengthy e-mails were exchanged between the team members almost on a daily basis as someone else had a day out on Grafham.

Finally, International week arrived. The visiting teams made their arrival over the previous weekend, but we decided to gather at the water from the Tuesday morning onwards.

Ed selected the practice pairings each day, all the time looking to pair up people who could learn from each other's styles. He also ensured that boats spent their day over all areas of the water to ensure that no pods of fish went undetected. Each evening, we spent long periods of time in debriefing sessions with maps of the water and boxes of flies being discussed in fine detail. It quickly became apparent that unlike in most years, there were very few fish in the middle of Grafham, and most were within a few yards of the bank. We felt this could only be attributed to the proliferation of the 'killer shrimp', which have formed a huge part of the trout's diet this year.

We also came to the conclusion through our three days of practice that despite the relatively high winds, fishing slowly in the upper levels of the water with nymph type patterns was bringing more success than the high speed lures that so often do damage on Grafham.

Based on this information, we built a plan so that by the time everyone went to bed on the night before the match, we all had a fly box, containing patterns numbered from 1 to 12, and line cards giving all the lines in our armoury a code name. This meant that we could communicate with each other when we were out on the water without giving away our methods to the opposing teams. Ultimately, this planning was crucial in our victory.

We have heard from those who acted as boatmen for the match that the English team's superior communication when out on the water was the difference between the teams, and several of the team, who did not start the day well, were able to turn to the most successful methods simply by talking to team mates around them.

The cry of "1, 3 and 4 on a Zulu" could be heard ringing out around the lake, and while this might sound like gibberish, if you know that it means two Crunchers and a Diawl Bach fished on a midge tip, it can make all the difference to a day's fishing.

As the boats set out at 10 am, I watched them leave the dock, and felt utterly helpless knowing I could do nothing more to influence the outcome.

We were fishing to a four fish bag, with catch and release at 2lbs per fish thereafter, so there was no question of an early finish for anyone.

As the boats started to return in the minutes leading up to 6pm, rumours of who had caught what started to reach me. I counted every one of my team off the boats, adding up each fish as they went passed me.

With two men still on the boats packing up, I had reached a tally of over 90 fish. A runner, spying on the other managers, came to tell me that with twelve of the fourteen anglers counted back for Scotland, they could only tally sixty-something fish, with the Welsh and Irish fewer than that. Finally, I was able to reach a total for the team of 105 fish.

Even before the weigh-in commenced, I had received the congratulations of the Scots, who had 76 fish, the Welsh with 62 and the Irish with 34.

In the event, we weighed in almost 230 pounds for our 105 fish, over 60 pounds ahead of the Scots.

As the teams departed to return to the hotel for the international dinner and all the celebrations that go with that, I'm not ashamed to say I

became a little emotional in the Grafham car park, immensely proud of what my team had achieved.

If I can say my efforts played some part in that stunning team performance, then I can consider myself to be a truly happy ex-England manager.

Richard Slater