

The Scottish Championships – Edinburgh (Musselburgh)

So why is this tournament interesting?

Only tournament not in England. Edinburgh is a wonderful venue for a competition traditionally held over the May Day bank holiday weekend. Also, on the playing side, the doubles pairs are put together by linking the top and bottom seeds, then the second top and second bottom and so on, until the two mid-ranked players are coupled at the end of the process. So you won't necessarily know your partner's name till Sunday morning – but, hey, we've all had Sunday mornings like that.

What is it like getting there?

A long way, but the three-day weekend means the whole business is less of a rush than some of the other regional tournaments. Flying is a good option, if only because it makes you feel like a professional footballer. Be warned, though, Loretto is on the far side of Edinburgh from the airport – a long (and usually expensive) cab ride – about seven miles from the city centre. Ever helpful, organiser Neil Roberts will sometimes start the singles quite late on the Saturday to allow time for people who are travelling from some way away (well, he did last year...).

What are the locals like?

A little bit Scottish, but as everyone knows, Edinburgh is like England but colder. They'll never admit it though, but ask them what they think of Glaswegians and the picture becomes pretty clear.

Anything I should know about the venue?

Loretto has a great reputation for producing players – Ian Purvis and Simon Fraser have both graced the Open circuit in recent years, while current schoolboy Jamie Pendergrass is a star for the future who's already won tournaments. The courts themselves are quick, so fast in fact that everyone can play at being infamous mighty-hitter Robin Perry for a day. Two of the three are excellent, but avoid playing on the left-hand one, which is 'dark, damp and manky' (to quote a recent visitor). However, it's worth mentioning that they are all now enclosed, which makes life much more pleasant for spectators. The school is seven miles from Edinburgh city centre.

What can I do up there if I lose in my first round game and can't face the plate?

An enormous amount – Edinburgh is renowned for its posh shopping and many scenic monuments. Go and sit on Arthur's Seat and contemplate your unlucky three-game defeat with the winning point won off a hinge. If you want to drown your sorrows, a pub crawl down Rose Street will soon put you in a better mood, if you don't mind the thousands of stag- and hen-nighters.

Where should I stay?

The Mrs Pride B&B in Musselburgh is very good, we're told. The Woodside Hotel (<http://www.infotel.co.uk/6055.htm>) is where most people drink in the evening and also where they eat if they're not going in to Edinburgh later on. In Edinburgh itself, the Grain Store is a nice atmospheric restaurant close to the Grass Market, one of the main pub and socialising areas in Edinburgh.

How/when should I enter?

By the third week of April at the latest. Organiser and vet Neil Roberts is famously pleasant, but feared by the cows of Cumbria so don't make him angry by entering late. Contact Neil on 01729 823260. It will cost you around £10 to play in the singles and £16 per pair to join the doubles competition – check with Neil for exact prices.

Can I park there?

Yes, in the school.

Who won it last time?

Hamish Buchanan.

The tournament's Magic Moment?

John Beswick has many memories of the competition from his youth (which is sepia-tinted these days) including rolling eggs down Arthur's Seat when the tournament was held on Easter Sunday. This has nothing to do with fives, of course, but is probably a better memory because of that. On court, John remembers a defeat there by legend Dave Hebden which took him 25 years to avenge. That's patience for you.