

How does Leamington's 2 aside League work?

How did it start?

The current two aside league started in 1997. We had previously run a junior after school competition at a single venue which was popular with the players but failed because of the difficulties of transporting players and finding volunteers to organise and supervise it. We decided the only practical alternative was an evening 2 aside competition similar to the 3 aside. We did not spend a lot of time working out lots of rules. We just started and ran it in the same way as the 3 aside.

The first season we had to canvas clubs to ensure we got 6 teams so that we had a proper division. After that it just grew by itself. There were two divisions the second season and the number gradually increased. This season it has 24 teams in 4 divisions of 6. Some years there have been more teams with 5 or even 6 divisions.

We guaranteed that it would not affect the existing 3 aside competition and that players were entirely free to choose whether to enter the 3 aside or the 2 aside or both. This meant there was no opposition from existing 3 aside players.

How does it work?

The organisation is almost identical to the 3 aside except that since there are only 2 players there are 5 matches (4 singles and a doubles) instead of 10. Matches start at 7.15 but finish at around 8.45 rather than 10.15 for 3 aside.

The only other difference is that while the 3 aside is based on 12 team divisions the 2 aside is based on 6 which means there are two competitions per season, autumn and spring with promotion and relegation at Christmas. This is because some of the younger players improve very rapidly and this gives the potential to move to a higher division after Christmas. It also means extra teams can be accommodate to fill any blank places in divisions or (if there are enough of them) to set up an extra division after Christmas.

Is it only a junior competition?

No, anyone can take part regardless of age or ability. In practice most players are junior as stronger adults tend to choose the 3 aside competition.

Why is the format so attractive?

The 8.45 finish on a school night is much more attractive to juniors. (Kelly Sibley started playing in Leamington's 2 aside when she was 9. That probably would not have been feasible in the 3 aside with its later finish).

Juniors like to be active. In the 2 aside they play in 3 of the 5 matches and umpire one. In a 3 aside they are just sitting around for quite a lot of the time.

Mums and dads are generally happy to stay and watch for 90 minutes which makes child safeguarding simpler. (Parents are less willing to stay for the whole 3 hours of a 3 aside match.) Teams of 2 often use a squad of 3 and the transporting parent often registers and plays as the third when needed.

The 2 aside is also suitable for adult beginners who might struggle in the stronger 3

aside competition.

What are the league fees?

Team fees are 75% of those for the 3 aside league. Player fees are the same as for the 3 aside. Those playing in both 2 and 3 aside only pay one player fee.

What is the standard of play?

The standard of the top 2 aside division overlaps with the lowest 3 aside. The lowest 2 aside division tends to be primary school age players in their first competitive season.

How are the divisions set up at the start of the season?

The request for entries and the setting up of the 3 aside and 2 aside divisions are organised together as a single process.

How much extra organisation does it put on the League Committee?

Very little. We have to publish a 6 team division fixture chart on line and in our handbook as well as a 12 team one. It is up to clubs and teams to fulfil their fixtures. As with most leagues we have provisions for postponed and unplayed matches which apply equally to 3 aside and 2 aside teams.

Does the 2 aside have special rules?

No. They are identical to the 3 aside (except that the number of individual matches is of course 5 rather than 10).

Where do the teams come from?

Most of the teams come from clubs which also have 3 aside teams, though some clubs only play 2 aside.

What venues are used?

The competition is home and away, the same as the 3 aside. It is up to teams to provide their own venue. Venues are easier to obtain because of the earlier finish. Leamington is lucky in that it has a 2 table headquarters which clubs without their own venue can hire for their 3 aside or 2 aside matches.

What effect has the 2 aside league had on your player numbers?

Before we started the 2 aside we had about 45 teams. We now have about 70. It varies year by year but we believe most years we have the second largest number of juniors (after Leicester) and the largest number of junior girls of any league in England.

Why has the Leamington 2 aside lasted for 20 years?

We treat it as an integral part of our league rather than a bolt on extra. Most of the 2 aside leagues that have stopped have still had young people wanting to take part but have hit organisational problems. We have overcome these by simply running the 2 aside competition as a fundamental part of our league in parallel with the 3 aside.