

*Highlights from the 4th Women's World Golf Croquet Championships 2011
Mount Maunganui, Bay of Plenty, New Zealand
November 19 – 26, 2011
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How did the opportunity to compete in the Women's World Championships come about?

Earlier this past summer (2011), I was reading the monthly USCA newsletter when I noticed a small article asking for women to travel to New Zealand to represent the United States for the Women's Golf Croquet World Championships.

I enjoy playing in tournaments and this seemed like it could be an amazing opportunity and a trip of a lifetime. I asked Len Canavan, the National Chairman for Golf Croquet, if this was something I should consider applying for. He said 'absolutely' and was incredibly supportive and encouraged me to go. He helped me every step of the way, putting me in touch with the proper contacts at the USCA and other players who would be there, all the while making sure that if I did get selected, I wouldn't get cold feet.

It was a few months later that I found out I had officially been selected, and as it turned out, I was the only woman from the U.S. who was making the trip. This might have been due to a number of reasons such as the distance and expense of the trip, and the time of year with the tournament being held over the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday.

Once I mentioned my potential trip to the members of the Hillsboro Club, where I work and teach croquet, they told me I would be crazy if I didn't go and they raised the funds to allow me to go. Their support and encouragement was absolutely incredible and overwhelming.

How long have you been playing croquet?

I've only been playing golf croquet for four years although living in South Florida I do have the added benefit of playing year-round. I'm also a certified regional referee which is incredibly helpful in keeping me current on rules and aware of different situations that might arise. Fortunately, I am still a competitive tennis player, so my past experiences competing in tennis were very helpful in my preparation for this tournament.

Had you ever been to NZ?

The farthest I had ever travelled was to Maui, so this was really going to be a much longer trip and I was a bit hesitant at first because of the amount of travel involved.

How did you prepare and what were your expectations?

Fortunately, being at the Hillsboro Club, I was able to practice each day on our croquet lawn and my husband, Bill, was great about practicing with me. Also, John Osborn came over and worked with me giving me some insight into what I might expect competing against some of the top players in the world.

I had a few goals in mind:

- 1) Be a good ambassador for the United States, the USCA, and the Hillsboro Club*

- 2) *Display good sportsmanship and compete well*
- 3) *Learn as much as possible from the experience*

What was your experience like?

The main venue in Mount Maunganui is a brand new beautiful facility specifically for croquet and lawn bowling. It had a great viewing area, six beautiful lawns, a restaurant, bar and meeting facilities. Fortunately, I was staying a few blocks away so it was a nice walk each day to the courts.

The day prior to the start of the tournament we had a couple of hours to practice. I happened to be sharing a court with a player from Australia and she was incredibly nice so we decided to play a couple of practice games. I was a little bit nervous but after we played a bit, I realized I was doing okay and having a good game with her.

Since I was the only player from the US and no one had ever heard of me or seen me play, I was in a great position as an underdog, having nothing to lose. The only pressure I had was what I placed on myself.

That same afternoon, we had a players' meeting with all the officials going over the details of the tournament. Interestingly, there were some pretty specific questions players were asking about seeding and other things and I can remember thinking, "Why don't you just let your play speak for itself and not worry so much about controlling the 'what-ifs'."

After the meeting, the opening ceremonies were held where we were officially welcomed by a number of people including the President of the World Croquet Federation, a gentleman from New Zealand's Parliament, the President of Croquet New Zealand and several others. Members of the country's Maori tribe performed and then each of the countries were introduced and we marched out carrying our respective country's flag. It was a very proud moment for me and I felt so grateful to be there. The day wrapped up with a "meet and greet" giving us a chance to socialize with each other.

There were a total of 56 women competing representing 11 countries. New Zealand and Australia each had 14 players in the tournament, Egypt had 8 players, so they represented the three teams with the most players. Other countries included Canada, England, Finland, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, and Wales.

We were divided into 8 "blocks" of 7 players each for the Block Play. During the first four days of the tournament, we played each of the players in our block in singles matches consisting of 2 out of 3 games to 7 points.

There were two other venues in the area that we played at (KatiKati and Tauranga) and our schedules rotated each day as to where we would play. Each match had its own referee and scorekeeper and a number of the referees came over from Australia and volunteered their time to be there. The cooperation and respect among all of the volunteers, groundskeepers, tournament organizers and officials was absolutely remarkable.

The other thing that was so impressive was the incredible sportsmanship of the players. There were no outbursts, no profanity, no bad behavior – these women were just great competitors and ranged in age from 15 - 85. Interestingly, as the week progressed everyone got even more friendly and relaxed around one another.

Our satellite venues were awesome. I can remember one morning, it was cold and rainy and we when we arrived and went in the quaint clubhouse, there was a woman there who had told us to relax, have a cup of hot tea, and a homemade goodie before heading out for our match. It was wonderful. Lunches were homemade and served by volunteers. It was delicious and the hospitality was just heartwarming.

After the block play finished, the top four players from each block went into the top 32 “Knockout” and consolation rounds. The rest of us mere mortals competed in “Plate.”

I already had 6 matches under my belt from block play (two of which lasted 3 ½ hours each on the same day giving me 7 hours of play with only a half hour break in between each match). This was a real test of mental endurance and over the course of these matches I covered a lot of ground.

Plate play consisted of 1-game matches to 7 points. We played 6 matches the first day and 5 more matches the next day. So over the course of one week, I played 17 matches and I am pleased to say that I won four matches and felt really good about how I played throughout the tournament.

Who won?

Throughout the tournament, the buzz was centered on the terrific Egyptian players. However, there were a number of upsets in the Knockout and the semi-finals consisted of four players, each from a different country – New Zealand, Australia, Egypt and England. It was exciting and everyone was thrilled that the level of play had risen to the level it had.

In the end, 22 year old, Rachel Rowe, outlasted New Zealand’s Jenny Clark in an epic 6-hour final (3 out of 5 game match).

After the final, we had a wonderful awards banquet and said our goodbyes. It had been such a great experience and I was sad that it had to end.

The Women’s World Championships are held every two years and are slated for Egypt in 2013.

Would you do it again?

In a heartbeat!

I want to thank everyone who made this experience possible for me and especially for the support of the USCA and the Hillsboro Club!

