

2011 USCA CLUB TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS

The National Croquet Center

West Palm Beach, FL

March 16-20, 2011

In a small cubicle located well within the secretive locked doors of the E. Rholsen Airport, a 72 year old man studies the wall. Now one of the few remaining residents actually born in St. Croix, aside from an occasional deep-sea fishing trip, he has never ventured beyond the golden shores, the beaches upon which he had once frolicked. The years of sun exposure have become more than apparent these days, his wrinkles magnified as his eyes focus upon and squint toward that one picture, at that unforgettable face which has hypnotized him for the past three weeks.

Against all rules, he lights a cigarette. His parents named him Douglas, but since his promotion some years back to the Homeland Security Department, he has been dubbed as 'Droopy,' a nickname based both upon attitude and appearance. With concentration unbreakable, he studies the smirk and that cocky lift of that eyebrow, nothing but disrespect emanating from this black and white photo. He coughs, wishes he had a set of darts and then spits into the nearby trashcan. His thoughts turn to mumbles: *You are never getting back on this island, John Warlick. And don't even think about trying.*

In New York, you could barely see her through the smell of beer and the unmistakable odor of left-over booze. Or hear her, through the smoke accidentally emerging from the small kitchen. Words abandoned, she slowly slipped the envelop across an experienced table, the crowded room at the Emerald Inn, long time haunt for New York Croquet Club Members, unaware of the deal in progress. Her suit was dark and her eyes darker, her pupils like coal and offering no opportunity for response. "You will do this," she whispered, rising from the table and quickly sliding through the swinging doors, now back into and quickly within the eternal neon night.

Even with the exit Sara Low, President of the NYCC and suddenly nothing but a secretive memory, no conversation followed. A deeper hush fell over the already silent table, her words still echoing within this corner booth, the lull broken only by the slanted words of Doug Moore: I need a shot of rum.

"You don't get it Doug. You just don't get it! There will be no more rum! We are all tired of rum. You did rum last year! It's time for you to repay those you love and those who can barely tolerate you...you must be

true to The New York Croquet Club...your home club! Stop whoring around and order a vodka!" And with these words, decibels above the juke-box and startling the crowded bar, casual alliances were broken and Carla Rueck took control, shortly followed by the center-fold bouncer who would take more, quickly showing Carla a more intriguing way into the dimming dark.

Sand breaks when stepped upon. This is the curse of Florida in late September, shade a commodity and any cool beverage a necessity. "I'll take a cool beverage," demanded John Warlick, not actually at a beach but well camped beneath a nearby Tiki-bar. "In one of those really suggestive glasses...with one of those fu-fu umbrellas!"

It had been a longer than normal Summer for John. Between bad investments and alleged police warrants, the time in his beloved St. Croix had been limited. He sat now talking at bar-maid Gloria, a well endowed bikini-clad woman from Jamaica whose ability to converse in English had surprisingly and suddenly dwindled. With all of his good friends about him, he sat alone, twirling both thoughts and the miniature umbrella, the shade offered by it serving only relief for the melting ice cubes beneath.

After several bounced checks, he had finally succeeded in joining The National Croquet Center, where heat and more heat keep both physical and social activities minimal during the sauna which Summer offers. And yet his mind kept drifting there, glances at Gloria parsed with the croquet opportunities which might be held within the cooler season ahead. His knocking over of the oversized rum-filled glass was not unexpected, his croquet focus broken as Gloria attempted to dramatize the art of a shaken martini.

Liquid flowed, carrying the ice cubes up and over the bar ledge, all now creating a dance upon the faux-sand and pavement below. The sun accommodated, forcing more movement and adjustment, and as John stared, as the surface was altered and without second thoughts, he understood: I will lead my new NCC flock...I will be the one-eyed king within the kingdom of the blind! I will once again be a god!

In general, St. Croix is nothing short of a beautiful island. Historically, the fine line between fact and fantasy is a hard one upon which to balance, priests and pirates muddying the text-books scattered throughout the school system. Even today, capturing the aura of St. Croix remains a daunting task, the island producing the strange mixture of both rum and lawyers. While the rum always works, the lawyers tend to play, tennis or croquet dependant upon the day of the week.

And if conquest remains an inbred trait within this pirate-island, as it apparently does, no band of conspirators has ever conquered the croquet headlines better than St. Croix's pride and joy, the infamous Bombay Croquet Club. For the past uncounted years, Bombay has invaded the largest USCA tournament, The Club Team Championships, with both numbers and ability, the Club sending an insurmountable armada to which other club's could only admire.

How this armada was assembled could be a text-book unto itself. Under the leadership of Les 'The Commish' Kelley, membership within Bombay skyrocketed overnight. The Club plundered, and pillaged, and before anyone could blink, members of clubs both small and large were suddenly, almost unwittingly, carrying a St. Croix flag. While many of these new members had difficulty even locating the Virgin Islands, with or without the aid of Mapquest, before they knew it they were pegging out in West Palm Beach, each shot played under the name of Bombay.

Of course, unseen storms, often hidden just over the horizon, have always been the bane of the pirate. And when the winds start to blow, they often carry further unpleasant surprises behind them.

Everyone had pencils, or pens, or crayons...whatever available at the time. It was the Opening Reception, usually a festive gala held just before the main event, but it looked more like study hall. The full moon rising over the twelve National Croquet Center courts, all of which would be in use for the next five days, went unnoticed. The bar, usually a collage of action as drink tickets are waved in desperation throughout the air, was subdued. In fact, only John Warlick relaxed there, his elbows resting comfortably between the bowl of cashews and the bev-naps. He was smiling, accepting drinks from well-wishers. Carla Rueck sat at nearby table, studying the expressions of those deep within the realm of math. Les Kelley was not to be found.

The speed of the calculations varied, but as time passed, the numbers were transferred, and verified, from ear to ear. Gasps were more common than comments, and as the news traveled, the bar regained it's normal degree of chaos, the sound level elevating into an orchestra of noise.

While the Lyon's Trophy is, generally speaking, awarded to the Club accumulating the most points via team finishing positions within the five Flights, the event is also divided into three Divisions, those determined by the number of teams entered. Send more, win more, and the Lyon's Trophy resides within your display case for a year.

The big surprise in the small-entry Third Division involved Heatherwood Hill. Usually a Second Division force, one to be contended with, the Mol family, a large gypsy-like merry band always around come the last day of competition, was apparently on sabbatical. Fielding only two teams, any thoughts of the Lyon's Trophy were gone, as it is for most Clubs falling into this Third Division. Even David Theiste, a Heatherwood Hills stalwart, abandoned ship, his body one of the few washing up upon St. Croix shores. PGA National, one of the most active Clubs in the country, also fielded but two teams while the Meadow Club of Southampton stumbled in with one entry, Tony and Carol Mayo.

The Second Division was perhaps the most interesting, a well contested fight between the West River Wickets (six teams) and Woodlawn (four teams) Clubs. Six duos came from the river and four emerged from the woods, and quite a battle it was. Apparently immune from the back-room tactics floating and affecting others, the outcome and finish for the characters involved, and there are many within both Clubs, was not determined until the last shots were played. Again, no chance for the Lyon's, but an honorable challenge to gain Division rites!

And so there was Les Kelley, finally found at the far end of the South Veranda, his fingers twirling an empty canister of rum, as though he were playing spin the bottle with his thoughts. Yes, he had done the numbers too, and they were not pretty. After fielding eleven teams the previous year, only nine remained today. Worse yet, those lured from the St. Croix shores had found their way home, suddenly now an inspiration to those about them. Les twisted open another cap, downed the contents and toasted, to no one in particular: "To you, Sara Low and Carla Rueck!" And with another quick removal of the liquid's protector: "And to you John Warlord...you scum-sucking parasite!" All three bottles were tossed toward a nearby wastebasket...each and every one missing the mark by wide margins.

With the gravity of the situation and the potential consequences of months of maneuvering now understood by all, the players slowly drifted or stumbled toward the exits, John Warlick one of the few to remain behind. While the year before had found The New York Croquet Club with a meager two teams on hand, that number had suddenly matched that of St. Croix, a more than impressive nine strong teams thrown into the mix. More importantly, the National Croquet Club, obviously with an edge due to the home court advantage, had tripled its historically respectable numbers. While there had been a six teams the year before, this number had now

grown to eighteen, each duo identified with matching attire. "Drinks are on me!" screamed John Warlick, though since this yell come out more like a whisper, no one, including the bartenders, had heard.

Yes, the action that ensued over the next five days was memorable, each match floating a balance of both personal pride and team loyalty. With a record of one hundred and four participants, a good game was never more than a fathom away, the one and a half hour games lasting from dawn to dusk. Almost everyone made the Playoffs, and thus once the double-elimination knock-out round began, the true drama began. The top five finishers in each Division earned Lyon's Trophy points, with matches even far from the Finals taking on further importance.

During the days, the beautiful South Florida weather showed off. The courts were in great condition and the lunches a feast for both eye and palate. At night, between scheduled and optional activities, the players let their guard down, slightly. Lines had been drawn, and it was perhaps not until the last round of matches that most of this ill will was released, the matches themselves having been played with honor.

Some numbers are fixed and some fluctuate, those found Sunday afternoon the final and floating result of hard work done both before and during the event. They speak for themselves, these mathematical outcomes, and Les Kelley knows that. He sits in his office in St. Croix and throws darts at the tournament charts, now filled in and nothing but a bad memory. He tries with an eye-patch on and gains the same result, each dart punching out the portion of paper previously containing John Warlick's name. In New York, Sara Low is on a conference call with Carla Rueck and Douglas Moore, the past now but a plan for the future. "Couldn't we have done this at the Emerald Inn?" asks Doug.

Several miles from the National Croquet Center, Gloria preps for the new day, cutting lemons and limes with the precision of a surgeon. The sun's rays are still sneaking beneath the Tiki-Bar's canopy, the reflection off the glasses blinding the eyes of the unwanted guest. "You're early," she snarls, the knife now looking more like weapon than utensil. Slice, slice, and then a pause. Bending her head to one side, curiosity now her enemy, she offers her form of a better welcome: "What ever happened to that guy you thought was going to take you out back? You know, that pirate guy?"

With his head now facing away from the bar and his sunglasses suddenly employed, the questions lingered within the air. Birds picked

through the sand and only a coconut falling from the nearby tree brought him back to the present. "The pirate? Oh yes, he avoided me all week. Coward. Even got a package from him this morning. Haven't opened it yet...probably an apology of some sorts. Went through Homeland Security so it must be cool! We'll see. Hey, can I run a tab till next week?"

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT

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|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1. Danny Huneycutt-Chuck Loving | NCC |
| 2. Derek Wassink-Peter Just | NCC |
| 3. Dick Brackett-Bob Chilton | NCC |
| 4. Ted Prentis-Justin Berbig | NYCC |
| 5. David Theiste-Ed O'Laughlin | Bombay |
| 5. John Young III-Doug Moore | NYCC |
| 7. John Phaneuf-Paula Phaneuf | PGA |
| 7. Missy Ramey-Jodie Rugart | NCC |
| 9. Linda Huxtable-Ron Huxtable | NCC |

FIRST FLIGHT

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|---------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Perry Mattson-Bill Whitman | Woodlawn |
| 2. Ruth Summers-John Warlick | NCC |
| 3. Jerry Luecke-Conrad Rugart | NCC |
| 4. Les Kelley-Bernie Pattie | Bombay |
| 5. John Blamire-Larry McDermott | NCC |
| 5. Peter Oleson-Stephen Morgan | West River |
| 7. Jerry Waechter-Guy Brown | NCC |
| 7. Tony Mayo-Carol Mayo | Meadow |
| 8. Sandy Walsh-Barbara Leeming | NCC |

SECOND FLIGHT

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| 1. Fred Beck-Randall McAndrews | Woodlawn |
| 2. Victoria Albrecht-Ron Atkins | NCC |
| 3. George Fulmer-Ted Cooley | Bombay |
| 4. Lee Hanna-Lynn LeBlanc | Bombay |
| 5. John Joseph-Cameron James | Bombay |
| 5. Francis Palasieski-Bob Lowery | NYCC |
| 7. Gerry McCauley-Lauren Hammond | NCC |

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|----------------------------------|-------------|
| 7. Andree Bothe-Flavia Logie | Bombay |
| 9. Sara Low-Karen Kaplan | NYCC |
| 9. Templeton Peck-Peter Timmins | NYCC |
| 11. Beth Ann Theiste-Robin Sweet | Heatherwood |

THIRD FLIGHT

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| 1. Don Lancto-James Feeney | NCC |
| 2. Calvert Chaney-Roy Morgan | West River |
| 3. Anders Theiste-Mell Mol | Heatherwood |
| 4. Rebeca Bergofsky-Carla Rueck | NYCC |
| 5. Rodney Calver-Tom Stoner | West River |
| 5. Dan Lawrence-Brian Cooke | Bombay |
| 7. Susan Savage-Peter Stevens | West River |
| 7. John Seidler-Kelso Sutton | NYCC |
| 9. Anthea Blamire-Julia Wallace | NCC |
| 9. George Mathys-Neal Hockman | NCC |
| 9. Karen Heckman-Linda Guthrie | Bombay |
| 9. Charles Alexander-Tim McCormick | Woodlawn |
| 13. Gerry Lancto-Gail Rubin | NCC |
| 13. Anne Licursi-Rosemary Faulconer | PGA |

FOURTH FLIGHT

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| 1. Melissa Hernan-Tim Mullen | NYCC |
| 2. Bill Brewer-Lin Irely | West River |
| 3. Eugenia Wilkie-Dawn Jupin | ALM |
| 4. Sandra Feeney-Arlene McDermott | NCC |
| 5. Mary Robb-Lisa Brown | Bombay |
| 5. Bill Krause-Nancy Morgan | West River |
| 7. Barbara Entzminger-Barbara Rappaport | Woodlawn |
| 7. Thi Marie Knorr-Pat Muir | NCC |
| 9. Faye Peithman-Alex Zielinska | NYCC |

LYONS TROPHY TOTALS

<u>Division 1</u>	<u>Points</u>
National Croquet Club	31
Bombay Mallet Club	11

New York Croquet Club	11
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Division 2

West River Wickets	11
Woodlawn	10

Division 3

Heatherwood Hills	3
PGA National	0
Meadow Club of Southampton	0

-John C. Osborn (TD)