

2011 USCA MID-ATLANTIC REGIONALS

The Merion Cricket Club

Haverford, PA

July 28-31, 2011

Nobody died. Or even fainted. While this is generally good news to offer after just about any croquet tournament, it is particularly satisfying to deliver this information after the 2011 Mid-Atlantic Regionals. Held at the breathtaking Merion Cricket Club, a facility which has seen its fair share of suspicious weather in the past, the forecast for this year's event was, well, also breathtaking. With temperatures expected to soar way-well above the 100 degree mark each day (small exaggeration), concerns quickly turned from pegging to passing out. Needless to say now, as it turns out, the predictions that many of the twenty-three participants would eventually burst in to flames were far from accurate. Things were on the warm side, with temperatures lingering in the low to mid 90s throughout, but all play went well and without either delay or incident.

In order to guarantee the physical safety of those involved, the schedule itself allowed the participants to walk about a half a step slower. Games began at 9:00 AM each morning and matches were timed at one hour and fifteen minutes. There were only five rounds of play per day and a one hour lunch break given so that all of the players could listen to Peter Oleson discuss the multitude of bad shots he had exhibited in the morning. While the one hour breather may not have been enough time to hear all of his horror stories, it did give everyone the opportunity to 'chill' out while feasting upon the fantastic Merion lunches. More importantly, with six courts available, plus a practice lawn, there was absolutely no double banking. And oh how the villagers celebrated the fact within that last sentence!

While the number of participants may have been on the low side, the make-up of each Flight was quite fascinating. Handicaps ranged all over the map, yet when you looked at the players and not the numbers, no participant was a favorite. The Championship Flight, for example, showed two entrants with a .5 or lower handicap with the remaining six ranging with handicaps from four to six! Still, while the two favorites did (just barely) make the Playoffs, so did the number seven and eight seeds! Much of this had to do with the fact that, once again, newer players were abundant, those whose handicaps seem to drop faster than the third ball of a Peter Oleson three-ball break. Sure, the New Paltz street gang was there in force, but so was Josh Betz, eight years shy of the legal drinking age! It's still hard to see anyone call David Cohen 'Sir', but there you have it.

Yes, the heat and the abundance of great food may have influenced the interesting and sometimes disturbing results reported after each round. Sir David Cohen, the only 6-handicaper in the Championship Singles Flight, was seeded number one after block play! Golden boy and New Paltz guru, Justin Berbig, didn't make the cut. Templeton Peck, the only six in the First Flight, failed to make the Singles Playoffs. Stephen Morgan, with a ten-handicap only a month ago, won the Block! Perhaps good strokes by some and heat-stroke by others; nothing was a certainty throughout the entire event.

By Sunday afternoon, of course, there were not only survivors, but survivors with trophies. In the Championship Flight Singles, wisdom would prevail. Or, said differently, the old guys did good. Chris Loat (.5) defeated Sinatra wannabe Francis Palasieski (4) in one Semi-Final (21-15) while Barry Gibson (0) gave Sir Cohen (6) a spanking (21-13) in the other. In the Finals, Chris started off poorly and then got worse, Barry capturing the title with an old-fashioned 26-9. He said something at the Awards Presentation, but after four matches that day and with that strange mumbling accent he has, everyone could only assume he was happy.

Roy Morgan (10) was pissed in the First Flight Singles. And why not? Usually when you take off from two feet, from directly behind your wicket, you should be able to win a game in last turn. Well, not so much. Eric Turner (9) took that Semi (16-15) while Roy's son, Stephen (7), did much better in the other Semi with a 15-12 victory over Bob Chenoweth (8). In this case, score one for the under-30 crowd. Stephen, who had just won the Second Flight in Greenwich less than a month ago, showed good control and style in the Finals. Eric showed up for the first thirty minutes only to eventually watch Stephen capture the title with a 16-11 score.

Strangely enough, Ian Sidey (10) had been the victim of Stephen just thirty days prior, but this week showed that he had learned much from his experience in Greenwich. Ian went undefeated in the Second Flight Singles Block play, defeated Iris Chenoweth (11) in the Semi and suddenly found himself

facing the determined John Seidler (11) in the Finals. (John had defeated young Tom Casey with a 12-9 score in the other Semi.) And a good game it was, Ian just surviving the last minute charge by John with a nail-biting 13-12 score. Once again, the older gentleman prevailed.

Doubles, of course, will always lend a degree of personality and emotion into the mix. Strange brew and stranger results. Favorites Chris Loat-Sir Cohen did not even make the Playoffs! Tempers rise to the top. "I'm pissed," said Justin Berbig, having failed to make the Singles Playoffs. "Me too," said Francis Palasieski, having lost in the Semi-Finals and still depressed about his really pathetic showing in the Under-21 Golf Croquet Championships in London. "Let's rock and roll!," they yelled in unison. And they did. Facing off against Barry Gibson-Templeton Peck, they entered the Final determined and never looked back, racking up a 20-13 victory to capture the Championship Flight Doubles. "I think the trophies should be cash!" yelled Francis. "I think you should start paying a full entry fee and not that college discount," responded Mid-Atlantic VP, Lee Hanna. And then there was quiet.

It was, actually, the First Flight Doubles which created most of the stir. In the Finals, the "I can't score a wicket with two shots from two feet" Roy Morgan was teamed with sexy Susan Savage. Their opponents, rising-star Ian Sidey and 5'4" 13-year-old Josh Betz. And you would figure that this would be a great game, right? Well, combine the wisdom of age and the enthusiasm of youth and you will soon find a 17-11 easy victory for the Betz-Sidey duo! Bob and Iris Chenoweth, along with Eric Turner and super-model, Alex Zielinska, tied for third.

Once again, the field for this event was small. Yet, I cannot remember a more balanced field and a more genial group. The Merion Cricket Club, as always, bent over backwards to accommodate every need and desire. From the grounds-crew to the service staff, Merion never pushes but goes about their business, simply allowing everything to be perfect. From the Opening Reception through the continental breakfasts and incredible lunches, past the awesome Player's Dinner and into the Final's Brunch, from those who expect the best to those who want the most, no stone was unturned.

The field this year was a great combination. In fact, the average age probably set a record. And who better to direct traffic than Lee Hanna, long-time Mid-Atlantic VP and starch promoter of the future of the game. What an amazing job of preparation she did. And what a wonderful result due to her hard work. Ask anyone who was here this year that, given the same circumstance, if they would be here the next. The answer is without doubt, but ask the question quietly...such a great unison happens so rarely.

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT SINGLES

1. Barry Gibson
2. Chris Loat
3. Francis Palasieski
3. David Cohen
5. Kevin Betz
6. Justin Berbig
7. Jim Armour
8. Peter Oleson

FIRST FLIGHT SINGLES

1. Stephen Morgan
2. Eric Turner
3. Bob Chenoweth
3. Roy Morgan
5. Templeton Peck
6. Josh Betz

SECOND FLIGHT SINGLES

1. Ian Sidey
2. John Seidler
3. Iris Chenoweth

3. Tom Casey
5. Alex Zielinska
6. Brian Davidson

CHAMPIONSHIP DOUBLES

1. Justin Berbig – Francis Palasieski
2. Barry Gibson – Templeton Peck
3. Peter Oleson – Stephen Morgan
3. Jan Balson – Jim Armour
5. Chris Loat - David Cohen
6. Kevin Betz – Barbara Leeming

FIRST FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. Josh Betz – Ian Sidey
2. Roy Morgan – Susan Savage
3. Bob Chenoweth – Iris Chenoweth
3. Eric Turner – Alex Zielinska
5. Tom Casey – Brian Davidson

-JCO (TD)