

2011 USCA AC Nationals
March 28 - April 3
National Croquet Center

Stephen Mulliner of Great Britain swept the twenty-fifth annual USCA Association Croquet National Championships, partnering with Brian Cumming to beat Danny Huneycutt and Jim Bast in the doubles final, then beating four-time finalist and 2009 champion Ben Rothman in the singles final. Mulliner becomes the first holder of the Stark Cup, the new perpetual trophy for the singles champion, given in honor of Jerry Stark.

He also becomes the fourth overseas player to win at this event, joining Joe Hogan of New Zealand, doubles winner in 1991, David Openshaw of Great Britain, singles winner in 1991, and Tony Stephens of New Zealand, singles and doubles winner in 1994. Internationally it is a well-kept secret that this is an open tournament. Mulliner has declared his intention of returning next year to defend his titles, so this may be the start of a new level of international participation and reputation for this tournament.

The First Flight attracted a small but keen group of players, who started the week by joining in the Championship singles and doubles blocks. This proved more than a mere warm-up, as each player won a singles block game. Steve Mossbrook won the singles, beating Jane Beharriell in the final with a sudden-death peel on partner. Donna Dixon won the doubles with Ted Quimby (filling in for Avril Rangoni-Machiavelli, who had to withdraw after block play).

The Championship Singles Plate had strong participation, twenty players playing fifty-two games over the last four days of the tournament. The top eight advanced to the plate knockout, where Wayne Davies beat Tom Yates in the final.

The Championship Singles final ended at sunset, leaving the manager in doubt to the very end as to whether or not the match would finish before dark. The tournament fell behind schedule from the very first round on Monday, and never caught up in Championship Flight. Games consistently ran longer than expected due to a combination of early-season form, solid hoops, and challenging and variably-paced lawns. Weather was also a factor at times, with heavy rain on and off throughout Monday, high winds on Wednesday, and heat, high winds, and tornado warnings on Thursday.

Ben Rothman showed the best form of the field early in the week, including a day in which he completed four triple peels in four games. In all Rothman completed nine triple peels for the week, far more than any other player. He ends the tournament as the top-ranked player in North America.

Tom Yates was the most improved player over the course of the week. He won five straight games in the Plate and improved his world ranking index 260 points for the tournament, a huge jump.

This year's tournament was expanded from six days to seven, to accommodate a doubles block. But with longer than expected games the schedule proved to be over-ambitious. The tournament committee will have to take a hard look at what format to use for next year. Note that the British Open is an eight-day tournament, without doubles blocks, and has apparently been expanded to nine days this year.

Ben Rothman set up a Twitter account for real-time updates. This worked well for occasional updates, but proved unworkable for detailed play-by-play posting, which exceeded the account limit. The Croquet World Online bulletin board became the main source of tournament reporting, including a turn-by-turn account of the singles final.

-Jeff Soo

Championship Singles (av. handicap 0.64)

- 1 Stephen Mulliner
- 2 Ben Rothman
- 3 Danny Huneycutt
Chris Patmore
- 5 Doug Grimsley
Brian Cumming
Jim Bast
Rich Curtis
- 9 Wayne Davies
- 10 Tom Yates
- 11 Rory Kelley
- 12 Rick Wilhoite
- 13 Stuart Lawrence
- 14 Martyn Selman
- 15 Steve Johnston
Jeff Soo
Peter Just
- 18 John Osborn
Johnny Mitchell
Mike Taylor
- 21 Jay Hughes
Charlie Smith
- 23 Rhys Thomas
Rob Hurst
Ted Quimby
- 26 Steve Summer
- 27 Tommy Harrington
- 28 Jim Field
Tony Reaves

Championship Doubles (av. handicap 0.52)

- 1 Stephen Mulliner & Brian Cumming
- 2 Danny Huneycutt & Jim Bast
- 3 Ben Rothman & Doug Grimsley
Chris Patmore & Jeff Soo
- 5 Rick Wilhoite & Rhys Thomas
- 6 Mike Taylor & Rob Hurst
- 7 Johnny Mitchell & Martyn Selman
- 8 Rich Curtis & Rory Kelley
- 9 Steve Johnston & Charlie Smith
- 10 Stuart Lawrence & Peter Just
David Bent & Wayne Davies
- 12 Jim Field & Tony Reaves
Steve Summer & Tommy Harrington
Jay Hughes & Ted Quimby

First Flight Singles (av. handicap 5.5)

- 1 Steve Mossbrook
- 2 Jane Beharriell
- 3 Donna Dixon
- 4 Avril Rangoni-Machiavelli

First Flight Doubles (av. handicap 5.0)

- 1 Donna Dixon & Ted Quimby
- 2 Steve Mossbrook & Tom Yates
- 3 Jane Beharriell & John Blamire