

2011 USCA SENIORS-MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIPS
National Croquet Center, West Palm Beach, FL
November 14-18, 2011

Always one of the more pleasurable events on the calendar, this year's Seniors-Masters Championships lived up to all expectations. While the weather came with some attitude the last day, rain and colder temperatures blanketing the participants still alive within the Playoffs, the remainder of the week was perfect.

With the National Championships having just been completed within the previous twenty-four hours and held thousands of miles away, concerns that the Seniors-Masters field would be depleted were unfounded. Fifty-eight names found their way onto the charts, up to nine courts were used and, with the sun setting early, matches commenced at 8:00 AM each day. The games themselves were timed at one hour and fifteen minutes and double banking was reserved for singles action only. Three games a day, per player, was the norm until the Playoffs.

In reality, the Seniors-Masters is a collage of events. Participants are split by age in both the Championship and First Flight singles, those aged 60-69 falling into the Seniors division and those 70 and above competing amongst themselves as Masters. The Second Flight singles combined all players 60 and, well, beyond. While the doubles is usually more simplistic with three combined Flights, the surprising fact that only three players signed up for the Second Flight did throw a wrench into the process. To accommodate all, these three players were filtered into the First Flight and given bisques in hopes to equalize play.

Also somewhat different this year was the fact that the event ran from Monday-Friday, a necessity given scheduling conflicts at the National Croquet Center. And if waking up to play at 8:00 AM on a Monday morning is not hard enough, the players found yet another obstacle as the matches began. Given the inclement weather the week before, necessary spaying of the lawns had been postponed but had to be done just an hour before the tournament began. The downside of this delay was that the spraying included a green dye, one which quickly attached itself to the balls, the hands of the players and the clothing they wore. It's humorous now, and was even then if you did not have a first round game, the dye having dried out by the time the later matches began. Dry-cleaning bills have been honored.

With only five rounds of matches on the docket each day, the schedule ran smoothly, leisurely and without delay. Upsets were common, close games were the norm and anticipation was in the air as the Thursday afternoon Playoffs were posted, net and even gross points often determining which players would move forward. And the upsets and close games would continue.

In the Championship Masters Singles Quarter-Finals, Bill Martin (0) surprised Ted Knopf (-1.5) with a 15-14 score while Paula Phaneuf (1.5) overcame (13-12) Mike Gibbons (-1.5), thus setting up some interesting Semis. Fred Jones (-1.5) would out-duel (14-13) Martin, and Jackie Jones (-.5) would gain stride with a 18-12 victory over Phaneuf. And thus...another Jones vs. Jones Final! In a game where both players could only win, Fred took the honors with a 26-8 outcome.

Meanwhile, most of the matches in the Championship Seniors division were also too close to predict, the closest Quarter-Final being Dick Sullivan's (-1) 12-10 victory over defending champion Jane Simonds (-1). Sullivan would continue to roll with a win over Dick Brackett (-2) and find himself facing Tim Bitting (-1.5) - victor over Alan Cottle (.5) and Peter Just (-2) - in the Final. Sullivan would look authoritative in his 18-7 win.

The First Flight Masters found Wendell Thompson (5) confused. "I can't believe I am still winning!" And winning he was, capturing one-point victories over Bill Taft (3.5) and Bill Copeland (4) to make the Finals. Ron Rowand (4) was also winning, by more decisive margins over Bill Losier (5) and Dolores Gallagher (5). And there is nothing more exciting than a one point Final, Rowand eventually sending Thompson back to earth with a 13-12 victory.

A court away, the First Flight Seniors division Final was nothing but a laughfest. Cynn timer Cagney (5) had worked hard to get there with her 16-9 win over Becky Essick (6). So had Bill Hartman (4), with victories over Suzan Copeland (4.5) and Andree Bothe (6). Luckily for Hartman, who was staying with Cagney, Cynn timer's desire to hit the ball straight disappeared. Completely. It was almost as though she had never played croquet before. And with that, Hartman took the Title with a 18-6 score, both participants laughing their way into the bar.

In the Second Flight Combined Singles, almost everyone played above their expectations; the matches were close and the attitude fantastic. Three players finished block play with 4-1 records, but it was to no one's surprise that the two top seeds made it to the Finals. What was a surprise was that Jennifer Thomas (9), playing her best croquet ever, defeated Vegas favorite Judith Cooley (9) with a 15-5 score. Well done.

The Championship Flight Doubles went pretty much as expected with all of the teams holding a winning record making the Playoffs, the odd-couple of Tom Hughes-Rufus Bayard the only anomaly to survive. When the dust settled, the top two seeds lived up to expectations and offered a great Final. With his partner, Stewart Jackson, having been pegged-out with but minutes remaining, Peter Just was left to hang on and battle forth. The opponents, Tim Bitting-Dick Brackett, would hear nothing of this and scrambled from behind for a 15-14 victory. Good stuff!

The combined First-Second Flight Doubles was nothing short of a rumble. With each team playing five matches in the qualification rounds, everyone won a match and only one team had a 1-4 record. Eight Playoff spots were available and while six teams had winning records, nine teams finished with 2-3 records. Yikes! While the third-seeded team failed to make the playoffs, the top two seeds both made the Finals. In this case, due to some nice break play, Alan Cottle-Avril R. Machiavelli would survive and capture the Title with a convincing 17-11 victory over Jim Seward-Ron Rowand.

Congratulations certainly go out to all of the participants who battled their way through some strong rain and wind on Friday. Luckily, by the time the last matches began the bad weather had dwindled, and by the time the trophies were awarded the sun peaked down from the skies. A great Friday Brunch kept everyone warm and the food throughout the entire event was phenomenal. The service at the NCC was spectacular for the week, including the Opening Reception, the 'Serious Croquet' book signing, the optional Lobster dinner, the Players Dinner/Silent Auction and the morning coffee and day-long refreshments.

While not all of the Seniors-Masters participants could stay for the Friday night Hall of Fame Dinner, the perfect explanation point to a great week, it was the party of the decade. Dan Mahoney, Dick Brackett and Rich Curtis were inducted and we should all thank them for working so hard to make events such as the Seniors-Masters possible. Archie peck and the grounds crew (green dye aside and not their fault) did a fantastic job, as did the NCC and USCA Staffs for hosting one of the largest event of the year. For those of you who are 59 today, we look forward to your company next year!

FINAL ORDER OF FINISH

CHAMPIONSHIP MASTERS SINGLES

1. Fred Jones
2. Jackie Jones
3. Paula Phaneuf
3. Bill Martin
5. Ted Knopf
5. Mike Gibbons
5. David McCoy
5. Art Parsells
9. Tom Hughes
9. Bob Chilton
9. Bill Hoy
9. Bill Grimsdale

CHAMPIONSHIP SENIORS SINGLES

1. Dick Sullivan
2. Tim Bitting
3. Peter Just
3. Dick Brackett
5. Mike Todorovich
5. Jim Seward
5. Jane Simonds
5. Alan Cottle
9. John Warlick
10. Rufus Bayard
10. John Curington
10. Chris Loat

FIRST FLIGHT MASTERS SINGLES

1. Ron Rowand
2. Wendell Thompson
3. Bill Copeland

3. Dolores Gallagher
5. Mike Conry
5. Jack Montgomery
5. Bill Taft
5. Bill Losier
9. Reine Bitting
9. Pat Garner
9. Larry McDermott
9. Bob Bozeman
13. Howard Holdsclaw
13. Jerry Luecke
15. Bill Rouady
15. Kathy Kuhasz

FIRST FLIGHT SENIORS SINGLES

1. Bill Hartman
2. Cynnie Cagney
3. Suzan Copeland
3. Becky Essick
5. Betty Whitlow
5. Andree Bothe
7. Nancy Reynolds
7. Ken Deason
7. Joe Pierotti
10. Avril Rangoni-Machiavelli

SECOND FLIGHT COMBINED SINGLES

1. Jennifer Thomas
2. Judith Cooley
3. Carla Rueck
3. Mary Robb
5. Lois Holdsclaw
6. Missy Diack

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. Tim Bitting-Dick Brackett
2. Stewart Jackson-Peter Just
3. Ted Knopf-Paula Phaneuf
3. Fred Jones-Jackie Jones
5. Tom Hughes-Rufus Bayard
5. Bob Chilton-David McCoy
7. Dick Sullivan-Ken Deason
8. Bill Martin-Jane Simonds

8. Chris Loat-John Warlick
10. Bill Grimsdale-Bill Hoy

FIRST FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. Alan Cottle-Avril R.Machiavelli
2. Jim Seward-Ron Rowand
3. Kathy Kuhasz-Becky Essick
3. Bill Copeland-Suzan Copeland
5. Jerry Luecke-Nancy Reynolds
5. Jack Montgomery-Betty Whitlow
5. Dolores Gallagher-Bill Losier
5. Bill Taft-Lois Holdsclaw
9. Mike Conry-Bill Rouady
9. Larry McDermott-Joe Pierotti
9. Howard Holdsclaw-Wendell Thompson
9. Carla Rueck-Missy Diack
9. Bob Bozeman-Andree Bothe
9. Bill Hartman-Cynn timer Cagney
9. Art Parsells-Pat Garner
16. Reine Bitting-Lou Fusz

John C. Osborn (Tournament Director)