

THE MAR-A-LAGO CLUB DOUBLES INVITATIONAL

Palm Beach, Florida

March 1-3, 2012

It is like a guest-pass to paradise, that letter or email offering you the opportunity to participate in one of the two Mar-a-Lago Club Croquet Invitationals. No, there is no prize money. Nor is the event sanctioned by the United States Croquet Association - results and player performances are not calculated or recorded within that data stream which flows from within the USCA offices. The trophies awarded are subtle and not to be placed upon a mantle...they are medallions and, in some sense, a pat on the back, an understanding nod well earned from across a crowded room. And within the gates of this magnificent Club, those players invited not only relish the game of croquet but celebrate it by their simple attendance.

The two lawns at Mar-a-Lago, though not quite full size, go beyond spectacular. Balls roll straight and the courts show no scars. When not upon them, the twenty-two participants dine upon an array of delicacies, and while the weather the first day offered some showers, the remaining play went without any distractions. The self induced battles the players opted for began early each morning, but when the shadows cast their way onto the lawns late in the day, the sun tipping it's hat for the players, it was and always is magical.

The preliminary rounds of action were in the Waterford style - a new partner and adventure with each match. By Saturday, the preliminary rounds having been completed within the two Flights, those surviving, more than half of the field, were given permanent partners. And as the numbers would have it, some interesting duos emerged.

In the Championship Flight Semi-Final, Larry McDermott & Joy Diesel just slide past Howard Zipper & Charlotte Hapak (12-11), only now to face the top two seeds Eileen Holberg & Gerry McCauley. While neither team seemed interested to wrestle early in the match, both sides passing for an extended period of time, a match eventually developed. Close throughout, McDermott's stellar break-play in the last fifteen minutes catapulted his team to a 17-12 victory.

The solid play by Ken Whitford & Carla Rueck was on full display within the First Flight. Having defeated Jim Feeney & Lisa Brown (19-10) in the Semis, the dynamic duo then overcame favorites Mary Anne Mathys & Susan Zipper in a narrow 12-11 tense-fest. As in the Championship Flight, no tears were shed, those involved appreciative of the great competition.

The Mar-a-Lago Club has always based its invitations upon the level of play within the Club, and while this Doubles Invitational this year (the 14th) limited entries to those with a 5-or-above handicap, those number may change soon. Throughout the years, many who have both played and won are now competing against the best in the World.

The Club fears that some of the Finalists this year may soon 'graduate' as well, and if this is the case, they will be missed.

The history of the Mar-a-Lago Club is rich, and those who participated this year are now a part of it. With the Singles Invitational still on the current calendar, I look forward to the memories yet to be made. Till then, below you will find the unchangeable facts:

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT

1. Larry McDermott & Joy Diesel
2. Eileen Holberg & Gerry McCauley
3. Howard Zipper & Charlotte Hapak

Also played:

George Mathys
Lee Little
Robin Sweet
Bob Chenoweth
Lou Fusz
Beth Ann Theiste

FIRST FLIGHT

1. Ken Whitford & Carla Rueck
2. Mary Anne Mathys & Susan Zipper
3. Jim Feeney & Lisa Brown

Also played:

Jeanne Branthover
Mary Robb
Iris Chenoweth
Sandra Feeney

-John C. Osborn
Mar-a-Lago Club Director of Croquet