

2012 USCA Association Laws National Championship
6-11 February 2012
Mission Hills Country Club, Rancho Mirage, California

For the third time this season Mission Hills Croquet Club hosted a USCA National Championship and raised the bar with 39 entrants. The well attended tournament was mostly Championship players with one third of the field opting for a spot in the first flight. Visiting players represented many regions and drew from 15 different states and provinces. The great showing is a sign that as the USCA continues to grow so does interest in the Association game. Players were treated to a wonderful dinner with mountain views and celebrations galore on the second night of the tournament. Five out of the six players responsible for the two Solomon victories were in attendance (Danny Huneycutt, Jeff Soo, Ben Rothman, Doug Grimsley and Jim Bast) and a champagne toast served as a belated celebration for last year's victory in England. Attendees also wished many of the North American representatives (Stuart Lawrence, Leo Nikora, Chris Percival-Smith, Peter Bach, Tommy Harrington) good luck in the upcoming world championships in Adelaide, Australia. Even without last year's champion Stephen Mulliner the tournament had a very deep field.

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Rich Lamm (playing during the buffet luncheon during the finals)

First flight had a few sharks in the pool with 2011 champion Steve Mossbrook, long-time championship player Arthur Bagby, and giant-killer Russell Uhler along with many contenders. Only four doubles teams entered the first flight allowing for a round robin before the finals. Three teams distinguished themselves with

two wins out of three but the duo of Rich Schiller and Mary Rodeberg would have to settle for third place thanks to their low gross point total. The final was local friends Dick Engebretson and Marvin Salles against Nick Gray and the visiting Stephen Morgan. Stephen began as a nine wicket player in Washington D.C., but after his performance at the eights he booked his flight out for nationals. On day one Stephen had trouble with the lawns and lost all of his games. After a cathartic shave (losing his lumberjack beard), the 22 year-old Virginian began an undefeated streak that brought his team to the best-of-three final. Stephen took his first break around for nine hoops leaving both his partner and his competitors to play catch up. In response, nearly every time Dick and Marvin set a decent leave, Stephen hit in to take away any chance for offense. The dynamic Nick Gray and Stephen Morgan followed up and won the match convincingly 13-9 and 16-5.

First flight singles was a 13 player free-for-all. In block play Mary Rodeberg and Steve Mossbrook pulled away from the pack with five wins in six games earning the top two seeds. All players with four wins made it out, but one of the four players at 3-3 (Toni Kemp) missed the cut with fewer gross points. The true double elimination format proved to be a safety net for the top seeds who both lost their first playoff games! Sheri Foroughi sent Mary to the loser's bracket while Arthur Bagby got revenge for his block loss to Steve Mossbrook. Stephen Morgan continued his streak by defeating Marvin Salles and then Arthur while Russell Uhler beat Jean Engebretson and Sheri Foroughi on his way to the semi-final. Mary and Steve battled through the loser's bracket but both fell to Arthur Bagby like fast moving insects getting caught by an opportunistic turtle.

Stephen returned to his long breaks and stunned Russell 20-7 setting up Arthur's knockout punch 15-6 leaving Russell dazed in third place. While Arthur had to beat Stephen twice in the final, many believed that his pace of play was the only way to keep Stephen from running away with the title. In order to dominate the time of possession (so to speak) one must be in control of the balls, but Stephen's long hit-ins denied Arthur the control that could have slowed the game. Stephen took full advantage of his innings and ended his tournament with an exclamatory 26-0 victory (his second of the tournament) to win a National title (his second of the tournament)! Dick Engebretson and others talked of holding a mock funeral to celebrate Stephen's short life in the first flight. Stephen went undefeated after day one and said of his two titles "they help to justify the time off [from work]."

In response to past criticism and a shorter tournament (6 days rather than 7) the championship doubles was played in a very English style with a best-of-three knockout ladder from the start. While this format is very reliable (the top two teams based on grade ended up in the final) many teams were limited to just a few games and the variable length of the matches (from 90 minutes to nearly 8 hours) wreaked havoc on the championship singles schedule. Once the field narrowed from thirteen teams to four and the dust settled some singles players had finished five games while others had only finished one (one player having yet to finish a single game)!

Leo Nikora and Chris Percival-Smith earned their way to the semis with an incredibly close match against the MacRob team of Jeff Soo and Rich Lamm. Jeff finished game one with a triple (+3tp) only to have Chris answer in game two (+21tp). Game three went to the 7.5 hour time limit for the match with Chris using his last turn to run all around the court, peel his partner through 3-back, and peg out to go ahead by one and win 22-21 after Jeff missed the final 15 yard hit in.

Stuart Lawrence and Mike Taylor also played a great match against Jim Bast and Brian Cumming to make the semis. The competitors split the first two games without completing any peeling turns with the underdogs taking game one 26-20 while Jim and Brian won 26-10 in game two. Game three nearly went to time but from a 22-9 deficit, Stuart Lawrence pulled off a timely triple peel (including a very difficult drag-jump shot from an angle at the rover hoop) to win +4tp.

In the semi-final matches the top two teams showed their stuff. Number one seed and two time champions Ben Rothman and Doug Grimsley dispatched of Leo and Chris with two clean triples (by Rothman) to finish the match +26tp, +23tp in a mere 90 minutes. The number two seed, Danny Huneycutt and David Maloof, was able to win in two fairly quick games +12, +26 setting up a marquis match-up for the finals. Unfortunately for spectators, there was not much to watch in the 95-minute, 13-turn final match. Grimsley managed to hit in twice in three attempts while David missed his four attempts. After running the first breaks, Doug's leaves allowed Ben to triple twice to win the team's third Association Doubles National title. Spectators

soon learned that well-played, clean games are quite boring.

Championship Flight Doubles First Place Goes to Doug Grimsley & Ben Rothman



Johnny Mitchell (USCA), Doug Grimsley & Ben Rothman (1st Place), Ron Hendry (TM)

Championship Flight Doubles Second Place Goes to David Maloof & Danny Huneycutt



Ben Rothman (TD), David Maloof & Danny Huneycutt (2nd Place), Johnny Mitchell (USCA), Ron Hendry (TM)

Championship singles was able to catch up on day three thanks to a day off from the lengthy doubles matches. The top two players set themselves apart with perfect records of 6-0 through the block. While Rothman tripled in every game, Danny managed to triple or better including a tpo against Jim Butts and a quintuple peel of his opponent's ball (qnpo) against Billy Bob Breeden. In two of the blocks four wins was necessary to make the playoffs but in the big cross-block the bar was lowered to three wins and the triple peel tie-breaker came into effect. Before head-to-head or gross points were considered, completed triples was the criterion for comparing records. Leo Nikora used this tie-breaker to earn the third and final playoff berth in lieu of Peter Bach who also had three wins. The big surprise was the fourth group as Eric Sawyer, the Pasadena player who had only played one Association tournament (2011 U.S. Open), earned the third playoff spot from the sixth seed in the block with three wins.

The four block winners were Ben, Danny, Jim Bast and Jeff Soo. The rest of the field played for the privilege to meet a block winner in the quarter-finals. The second seeded players mostly dominated the number three seeds as a group. Doug Grimsley, David Maloof, and Rich Lamm powered through the first round with twin triple peels and only Lamm went to three games (with Leo Nikora). Brian Cumming fended off his fellow Canadian Chris Percival-Smith with two close games (+9, +12), but that was just a warm up for Brian. Brian continued strong in his match against his doubles partner Jim Bast. Cumming didn't let his partner have croquet in a spectacular +26tp, +26tp match. The other top seeds had their own problems as Grimsley took apart Jeff Soo +26tp, +10 and David Maloof got first blood against *his* doubles partner +17, +21 leaving Danny on the

sidelines. These were David's first ever tournament games against Danny Huneycutt, despite the fact that they both began playing Association Laws at the 2002 North Carolina Open! Rich Lamm showed that his eye problem (which forced him out of the Desert Classic two weeks previous) was not a factor with two long, drawn-out two-against-one games spanning two days against Ben Rothman. Both players pegged striker ball out on the croquet shot from distance even as the object ball missed the peg! Ben failed the pegout in game one and lost 26-25 and Rich missed the pegout (with the same ball, no less) and lost by one in the second game. Rich left Ben to his tournament director duties with a nice +21 double peel finish. With all four block winners out of the way, the number two seeds played with renewed optimism.

Picking up where he left off, David Maloof won his first tournament game against Brian Cumming, but Brian started to hit well just as David slipped. Brian took game two with a triple and took advantage 26-21 after David failed to finish game three. Having won the 2008 National Championship against Ben Rothman, Brian was in familiar territory. In the other semi-final Doug and Rich had one of the closest matches of the tournament with Rich edging out the goliath by one hit in +26tp, -26tp, +17tp. Rich has a nice resume of his own with a 2007 Association National Title as well as the recent 2011 Golf Croquet National Championship. Thanks to neither player progressing to the doubles final, there was time for an epic best-of-five for all to see during the courtside luncheon.

With the Championship doubles final quickly wrapped up and Stephen Morgan keeping his victory at a high tempo there was little for spectators to enjoy except the championship game and the plate event beside it. While Brian and Rich circled each other like boxers checking for weaknesses, the top four finishers (all with 8 wins) battled for the plate. Two established team USA veterans in Danny Huneycutt and Jim Bast sparred with soon to be world championship contenders Stuart Lawrence and Peter Bach. Danny drew Peter in the first round but with a bit more trepidation after Peter turned a tpo against Danny in an earlier plate game. Danny didn't get the chance to tpo in this game as Peter took three breaks around to dispel the doubters with a +26 finish. Stuart would not be as dominant, but he edged out Jim Bast by one point for a spot in the final. Both players were hitting well and neither seemed to have trouble with break play. In the end, Stuart exhibited the stark difference between Peter and himself; Stuart triple peeled to win the plate +17tp.

Plate Goes to Stuart Lawrence



Ben Rothman (TD), Stuart Lawrence (Plate), Johnny Mitchell (USCA), Ron Hendry (TM)

By the time the plate finished, the main event was just getting started. Rich had taken game one +26 only to have Brian re-raise with a +26tp. Rich refused to be outclassed and responded in kind +26tp. For game four Brian tried a new tack with a tpo. Rich's aggressive shooting gave him a few good finishing attempts with three-ball breaks, but a failed return roquet and missed hoops allowed Brian to win +10 tpo and level the match at two wins apiece. In the late afternoon, the narrowest margins decided the game. Lift shots were tickling target balls or missing by a fine hair and while no tpo was attempted both players had peeling chances. Rich failed his triple and cracked the window of opportunity open, but Brian could not capitalize. Rich finished with a mini break and nice close pegout (+17) for his second USCA Association Rules National Championship.

Championship Flight First Place Goes to Rich Lamm



Ben Rothman (TD), Rich Lamm (1st Place), Johnny Mitchell (USCA)

Championship Flight Second Place Goes to Brian Cumming



Ben Rothman (TD), Johnny Mitchell (USCA), Brian Cumming (2nd Place), Ron Hendry (TM)

CHAMPION FLIGHT SINGLES

NAME	PLACE
Rich Lamm	1 st
Brian Cumming	2 nd
David Maloof	T-3 rd
Doug Grimsley	T-3 rd
Ben Rothman	T-5 th
Danny Huneycutt	T-5 th
Jim Bast	T-5 th
Jeff Soo	T-5 th
Chris Percival-Smith	T-9 th
Stuart Lawrence	T-9 th
Leo Nikora	T-9 th
Eric Sawyer	T-9 th
Ron Hendry	T-13 th
Rich Curtis	T-13 th
Peter Bach	T-13 th
Britt Ruby	T-13 th
Rich Schiller	T-13 th
Tommy Harrington	T-13 th
Jim Houser	T-13 th
Mike Orgill	T-13 th
Norris Settlemyre	T-13 th
Jim Butts	T-13 th
Mike Taylor	T-13 th
Billy Bob Breeden	T-13 th
Bruno Amby	T-13 th
Johnny Mitchell	T-13 th

CHAMPION FLIGHT PLATE

Stuart Lawrence	1 st
Peter Bach	2 nd
Danny Huneycutt	T-3 rd
Jim Bast	T-3 rd

CHAMPION FLIGHT DOUBLES

NAME	PLACE
Ben Rothman	1 st
Doug Grimsley	1 st
Danny Huneycutt	2 nd
David Maloof	2 nd
Chris Percival-Smith	T-3 rd
Leo Nikora	T-3 rd
Stuart Lawrence	T-3 rd
Mike Taylor	T-3 rd
Rich Curtis	T-5 th
Norris Settlemyre	T-5 th
Jeff Soo	T-5 th
Rich Lamm	T-5 th
Jim Bast	T-5 th
Brian Cumming	T-5 th
Ron Hendry	T-5 th
Mike Orgill	T-5 th
Johnny Mitchell	T-9 th
Jim Butts	T-9 th
Bruno Amby	T-9 th
Tommy Harrington	T-9 th
Peter Bach	T-9 th
Billy Bob Breeden	T-9 th
Britt Ruby	T-9 th
Jim Houser	T-9 th
Eric Sawyer	T-9 th
Steve Mossbrook	T-9 th

FIRST FLIGHT SINGLES

NAME	PLACE
Stephen Morgan	1 st
Arthur Bagby	2 nd
Russell Uhler	3 rd
Steve Mossbrook	4 th
Mary Rodeberg	T-5 th
Sheri Foroughi	T-5 th
Marvin Salles	T-7 th
Jean Engebretson	T-7 th
Toni Kemp	T-9 th
Karen Comeau	T-9 th
Nick Gray	T-9 th
John Destry	T-9 th
Dick Engebretson	T-9 th

FIRST FLIGHT DOUBLES

NAME	PLACE
Stephen Morgan	1 st
Nick Gray	1 st
Marvin Salles	2 nd
Dick Engebretson	2 nd
Mary Rodeberg	3 rd
Rich Schiller	3 rd
Jean Engebretson	4 th
Karen Comeau	4 th

USCA Association Laws National Championships Winners



Standing: Arthur Baby, Nick Gray, Steve Morgan, Ben Rothman, Doug Grimsley, David Maloof, Dick Engebretson, Danny Huneycutt, Brian Cumming, Stuart Lawrence
Kneeling: Rich Lamm

Stark Trophy



Story by Ben Rothman
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