

2012 USCA SENIORS-MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIPS
National Croquet Center, West Palm Beach, FL
November 13-17, 2012

You might be wondering why coins are tossed at 8:15 AM during the Seniors-Masters Championships. It does seem a bit early, but as each day meanders along, the reasons become self evident. Generous gaps are given between matches, allowing those with back-to-back games the ability to relax, well, their backs. The lunch hour is, or is just about, actually an hour. And even for those who show up a half a day late (Jake Johnson), the format offers leeway and allows everyone a bisque or two in regard to a misread schedule. Still, while the pace of play is casual in nature, with naps proving to be a popular option during the afternoon hours, the attitude upon the lawns is as intense as within any other event upon the tournament schedule.

This year drew 54 players and the competition filtered into eight unique divisions of play. The youngsters, those aging gracefully in the 60-70 year age-group, filled up the Seniors charts in both the Championship and First Flight Singles while the Second Flight Singles and all three Flights of Doubles were combined. The Masters Singles involved those above the age of 70 with Lou Fusz, hovering in the low-mid 90s, leading the way in regard to spirit. Matches were timed at a civilized one hour and fifteen minutes and the format was the standard block play leading to single elimination ladders. The fact that the weather was absolutely fantastic throughout aided in keeping all of the games on or ahead of time from start to finish.

Always known as one of the more social events of each year, night-light activities gave all of the participants the chance to share stories and relive moments of glory, disaster and humor. The event began with an Opening Reception and continued to offer an optional Lobster Night, an optional Toast & Tally and the traditional Players Dinner. Continental breakfasts and wonderful lunches, hot or cold, were served daily. The Hall of Fame Dinner, celebrating Johnny Mitchell, Ruth Summers and Jack McMillin added wonderful memories to all of those in attendance. And while it is not usually a Saturday event, the abundant brunch served Saturday left everyone well fed and happy. The fact that the start-time of all matches on both Friday and Saturday were delayed until 9:00 AM was much appreciated!

Steps away from the bar, always available for those in need of a quick remedy, the lawns themselves were in wonderful shape. For the first time, painted lines replaced the dangerous and attitudinal string usually found. Complaints or confusion were expected, but not a question or concern arose. In fact, the change was applauded by almost everyone. The hoops were set with generosity, and the smooth ground around each was noticed by all of those who play at The National Croquet Center regularly.

In the Championship Masters division, top-seed Dick Sullivan (-1.5) failed to make the Playoffs. Long-shot Steve Warner (2.5) did. David Ekstrom (0) went 5-0 in Block Play, as did the very hot (both on and off the lawns) Jackie Jones (-1). But within the Playoffs, past glory becomes nothing more than that. Fred Jones (-1.5) defeated wife Jackie (19-11) while David McCoy (-1) snuck by Ekstrom (14-13), and with McCoy somewhat rested in that he did not compete within the Doubles, his 18-5 victory in the Finals was but a minor surprise.

Mike Gibbons (-2) looked consistent throughout in Championship Flight Seniors. While he could have played in the Masters, Gibbons chose to take on the youngsters, and after defeating Tim Bitting (-1.5) and the upcoming Alan Cottle (0), he was pitted against hotshot Peter Just (-2) Just had defeated the surprising and impressive Steve Mossbrock (3 - handicap adjustment coming) in the Semis, but came up Just short (13-15) as Gibbons continued his concentrated play.

The First Flight Masters was perhaps the most wide-open Flight, with so many of the 16-player division with a good chance to win. All but one of the Playoff matches was determined by more than one wicket, but in the end Howard Holdsclaw (5) clawed his way past Avril Rangoni-Machiavelli (5) with a 14-13 score. Great play was seen throughout the event, and were the

tournament to be played ten more times, there is a good chance that ten different victors would be found. Really awesome play by all throughout!

Within the First Flight Singles, well...this was an intimate group. With only four players upon the menu, each played each other twice...the top two making their way into the Finals. Given that two of the participants, Jim (4.5) and Mijai (5) Pagano, knew each other better than, well, pick your own comparison, this might explain why the intense Reine Bitting (4.5) and John Blamire (4.5) wandered their way into the ultimate match. Having spitting their two previous matches, it was no surprise that the Final was a good one, Blamire capturing the Title with an 18-14 outcome.

If you have never been to a pot-luck lunch, the Second Flight (combined) Singles may well be a good example of what to expect. With some novice players and some experienced experts, all of whom with handicaps which could change in a moment, anything was possible. In the end, Charles Alexander (9) proved to be the best with his 15-7 victory over the amiable Russell Dilley. Antonia Vincent and Anne Licursi also deserve a round of applause for their good block play!

While Doubles is not something that usually needs a great deal of reporting, especially for a tournament as social as this, it must be said that the finish of the Championship Flight was a spectator's delight. When Fred and Jackie Jones, in their calculating way, managed to gain a one-wicket advantage in last turn, Peter Just, teamed with the Stewart ("Why am I playing with this guy?") Jackson (-2), was faced with a daunting task. In order to tie the match, Just had to take-off from the first corner and score 1-back to tie and inevitably win the match. The take-off was lucky, skirting by the wrong side of the wicket. The wicket shot itself was tough, especially for a player who could not usually score a wicket from two-inches in front. From a long and angled position, Just nailed it and Just-Jackson walked away with a 20-19 victory! Jeffrey Mattison (4) and Jake Johnson (6) captured the First Flight with a 12-10 score over the somewhat favorite team of John Blamire and Larry McDermott (6 for now). Charles Alexander and Tim McCormick (Club Team experts) nailed down the Second Flight with a 13-11 victory over Russell Dilley and Gary Neal.

Overall, the Seniors-Masters is one of the most enjoyable tournaments ever to participate within. Players applaud an opponent's good shot. Play is exactly as the word is defined. A glance at the sky sees the beauty within the cloud formation...not how a brief shower will affect the speed of a lawn. Time is allowed to enjoy sharing a lawn with both new friends and those who have walked the same path before. It's just darn good fun.

Lastly, everyone appreciated the efforts made by both the USCA staff and by those that work for the National Croquet Center. Both facilities, unique in their own way, work within budgets, but it is doubtful that anyone could question the honest concern shown by all that the enjoyment of those in attendance was the main concern. Yes, there is a good chance that no one will remember who won this year next year. In the greater scheme of things, it doesn't matter. If you were here, you understand that. If you were not here...be here next year!

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT SENIORS SINGLES

1. Mike Gibbons
2. Peter Just
3. Steve Mossbrock
3. Alan Cottle
5. Tim Bitting
5. Bill Hartmann
7. Chris Loat
8. Johnny Mitchell
8. John Curington
8. Michael Todorovich

11. Donna Dixon
11. Paul Phoenix

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT MASTERS SINGLES

1. David McCoy
2. Fred Jones
3. Jackie Jones
3. David Ekstrom
5. Steve Warner
5. Bob Chilton
7. Jack Montgomery
7. Geoffrey Mattison
7. Dick Sullivan
10. Maryholt Maxwell

FIRST FLIGHT SENIORS SINGLES

1. John Blamire
2. Reine Bitting
3. Jim Pagano
3. Mijai Pagano

FIRST FLIGHT MASTERS SINGLES

1. Howard Holdsclaw
2. Avril R.-Machiavelli
3. Wendell Thompson
3. Jake Johnson
5. Vincent Marmo
5. Martie Ekstrom
5. Larry McDermott
5. Harold Menzel
9. Bob Bozeman
9. Andree Bothe
11. Nancy Reynolds
11. Ed Wilford
11. Doug McKeckneay
11. Dolores Gallagher
11. Bill Losier
11. Betty Crisler

SECOND FLIGHT SINGLES

1. Charles Alexander
2. Russell Dilley
3. Antonia Marmo
4. Carla Rueck
5. Tim McCormick
6. Albert Muren
- dnf. Anne Licursi

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. Peter Just-Stewart Jackson
2. Fred Jones-Jackie Jones

3. Tim Bitting-David Ekstrom
3. Johnny Mitchell-Bob Chilton
5. Alan Cottle-Avril Rangoni-Machiavelli
5. Chris Loat-Paul Phoenix
5. John Curington-Bill Hartmann
5. Mike Gibbons-Dick Sullivan
9. Michael Todorovich-Donna Dixon
9. Steve Mossbrock-Jack Montgomery

FIRST FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. Geoffrey Mattison-Jake Johnson
2. John Blamire-Larry McDermott
3. Wendell Thompson-Howard Holdsclaw
3. Jim Pagano-Mijai Pagano
5. Betty Crisler-Antonia Marmo
5. Martie Ekstrom-Howard Menzel
5. Vincent Marmo-Andree Bothe
8. Doug McKechney-Beatty Cramer
8. Maryholt Maxwell-Nancy Reynolds
10. Bob Bozeman-Ed Wilford
10. Reine Bitting-Lou Fusz
12. Bill Losier-Dolores Gallagher

SECOND FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. Charles Alexander-Tim McCormick
2. Russell Dilley-Gary Neal
3. Carla Rueck-Anne Licursi
4. Anthea Blamire-Albert Muren

-John C. Osborn (TD)