

2013 Mission Hills Invitational

The snowy mountain backdrop and the warm, cloudless climate set the scene for perfect performances. Every winner of every division of singles and doubles was able to win the tournament undefeated. For the third year in a row, Ben Rothman dominated the championship singles competition in impressive fashion. Not only did the current National Champion go undefeated again, but he never gave up more than four points in a game while completing two half-Spooners (26-1), one of which was saved for the decisive final game. While the 27 minute match was clinical, the quick finish left the spectators with nothing to watch while they enjoyed mid-morning cocktails. Thankfully there were plenty of battle stories to be told and missed opportunities to lament after the five-day contest.

Players from as far afield as Maine and Maryland as well as Idaho and the Carolinas joined the local players for this relatively small installment of the Mission Hills Invitational. Twenty-two driven competitors divided into two flights of singles and doubles and prepared for a true double-elimination playoff in singles. Martinis, manhattans and many bottles of wine fueled boasts, predictions and a few friendly wagers once competitors found the opening reception venue. With so much room for entertaining, many players found the ballroom by walking through a wedding rehearsal dinner! But the pleasantries and celebrations all came to an end and that is when the games began.

The first flight featured the new and exciting break play of Nick Gray and Cameron Evans while sharp-shooter Pat Dugan made his mark. Veteran Marvin Salles as well as Dick and Jean Engebretson worked to fend off the new class in singles and doubles, respectively. Marvin stiff-armed his way to some nice victories while barely holding off Nick Gray in last turns 17-16 to win the block and claim the top seed. Nick turned his loss into motivation and scored three peg-outs on his way through the knockout ladder, but he ran into last year's first flight winner Cameron Evans. Cam defeated Nick in both the winners and the losers side of the ladder with a 20-19 victory in the semi-final. Cameron has the creativity and demeanor of a pool shark on the lawns, but it was not enough after Marvin warmed up and pegged out his last few games (two against Cam) including a 26-11 final.

Nick and Cameron's efforts were enough to overcome the doubles competition despite Alan Langley coaching newcomer Gary Neal into a second seed in the playoffs. The Engebretsons worked well together and took down the hi-low team for a spot in the single elimination final. Dick took a big lead with an 8-hoop break early on, but Cam and Nick chipped away while keeping Jean from progressing. Eventually Dick became a rover, but Cam and Nick pulled ahead in last turns 16-15 to take the first flight doubles title.

The championship flight doubles has been a tough nut to crack as the guru of croquet, Larry Stettner, and his protégé won the last two competitions, but the two best locals took a shot. Having played against each other in many doubles competitions Ron Hendry and Jim Butts rarely play together. Joining the fray, Dr. Rick Sheely partnered with his fellow Minnesotan Mary Rodeberg to make the field even more difficult. Jim and Ron were the only team to hear the hollow aluminum of the peg in block play while the dynamic team of Peter Bach and Donna Dixon came closest with a 21-12 victory over Steve Mossbrook and Simon Jenkins. But 21 points would not be enough in the end as Jim Butts and Ron Hendry outlasted the late charging champions, Larry and Ben, to take the title 24-21.

While Rothman ran away with the singles field, there were other notable skirmishes along the way. Steve Mossbrook scored an early upset over Jim Butts 26-7, but Jim tagged him back in an elimination game. Rick made his mark with an undefeated block performance, but Ben knocked him into the loser's ladder which belonged to Jim. On the day before the final Jim lived in the loser's ladder. His own partner knocked him down in the first round, but after a doubles victory in the morning Jim could not be stopped. Jim retired Alan Langley, Steve Mossbrook, Ron Hendry and finally Rick at the end of a five game marathon that proved this Butts doesn't quit. Ben handed Jim a neatly packaged loss in the final, but the survival effort in the bracket was a feat to remember.

Photos can be found at the [Mission Hills Croquet Club Photo Gallery](#).

CHAMPION FLIGHT SINGLES

NAME	HDCP	PLACE	TRK PTS
Ben Rothman	-4	1st	9
Jim Butts	-1	2nd	2
Rick Sheely	-1	3rd	3
Ron Hendry	0	4th	8
Peter Bach	2	T-5th	-3
Steve Mossbrook	3	T-5th	12
Donna Dixon	1.5	T-7th	0
Alan Langley	5	T-7th	6
Len Lyon	3.5	T-9th	-2
Mary Rodeberg	5	T-9th	-6
Rob Coleman	5	T-9th	-6
Simon Jenkins	3	T-9th	0

FIRST FLIGHT SINGLES

NAME	HDCP	PLACE	TRK PTS
Marvin Salles	7	1st	11
Cameron Evans	8	2nd	2
Nick Gray	9	3rd	11
Pat Dugan	13	4th	1
Bob Morford	9	T-5th	-8
Tom Stoner	11	T-5th	-5

CHAMPIONSHIP DOUBLES

NAME	HDCP	PLACE
Jim Butts	-1	1st
Ron Hendry	0	1st
Ben Rothman	-4	2nd
Larry Stettner	1.5	2nd
Rick Sheely	-1	T-3rd
Mary Rodeberg	5	T-3rd
Peter Bach	2	T-3rd
Donna Dixon	1.5	T-3rd
Steve Mossbrook	3	5th
Simon Jenkins	3	5th

FIRST FLIGHT DOUBLES

NAME	HDCP	PLACE
Nick Gray	9	1st
Cameron Evans	8	1st
Richard Engebretson	7	2nd
Jean Engebretson	8	2nd
Alan Langley	5	T-3rd
Gary Neal	13	T-3rd
Pat Dugan	13	T-3rd
Tom Stoner	11	T-3rd