

USCA 9 Wicket Croquet National Championship December 8-10, 2013 West Palm Beach, FL



Standing: Harry Ketchum, Gerald Shugar, Bill Trower, Dale Locke, Bob Kroeger, Craig Danna, Roy Morgan, Stephen Morgan, Jasmine Morgan, Matt Griffith, Gail Rubin, Pat Muir, Mike Gibbons, Cynthia Gibbons, Reid Fleming, Ray Liberti. Kneeling: Bill Mead, John Warlick. Front: Sandra Knuth Walsh, George Cochran

Hat Trick for George Cochran in West Palm Beach **By Bob Kroeger**

The 2013 USCA 9 Wicket Croquet National Championship was held at the National Croquet Center (NCC) in West Palm Beach, FL December 8-10. The weather overall was outstanding (an occasional rainstorm did come through but didn't delay play). Seven full sized courts were setup on the "Back 9" area of the NCC. There were 12 Championship Singles players and five First Flight Singles players. Champions Doubles had six doubles teams and First Flight Doubles had four teams.

Day One was singles. This featured block play - in Championship Flight there were two blocks of six with all players getting five games. The top two from each block made the playoff which was held on the last day, Tuesday. Block One had two-time 9 Wicket Singles Champion, George Cochran coming in first followed by defending Singles Champion, Stephen Morgan. In Block Two Bob Kroeger came in first with Michael Gibbons coming in second. First Flight had one block of five players with the top two making the finals. Here, Gail Rubin came in first with Harry Ketchum coming in second to make the finals.

Day Two was doubles day. Championship Flight had a block of six teams with all teams playing five games against each other. Defending Doubles Champions, George Cochran and John Warlick, came in first and 2008 National Doubles Finalists, Bob Kroeger and Reid Fleming, came in second to make the finals. First Flight had four teams playing each other with the team of Bill Trower and Ray Liberti coming in first; and Harry Ketchum and Craig Danna coming in second to make the finals.

Day Three started with Championship Flight Singles. George Cochran, who had played magnificently all during the tournament, brought his A-game against Mike Gibbons to make the final while Bob Kroeger and Stephen Morgan had a nail biter that had to go down to last turn to determine the finalist. Kroeger just snuck by the very strong play of Stephen to then play George in the Singles final. Here, George just dominated gaining an easy victory over Kroeger to win his third 9 Wicket Singles title. George knows 9 Wicket Croquet!! First Flight had two players who played very consistently - Gail Rubin and Harry Ketchum. Both Gail and Harry had opportunities throughout the game but Harry was able to prevail in the end in a close match.

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We then went to the Doubles final where in Championship Flight John Warlick was on fire running a nearly all around break to penultimate. After a little back and forth, George turned it on with a great all-around break crushing the team of Kroeger and Fleming to win their second consecutive Doubles Championship. In First Flight, the Doubles team of Bill Trower and Ray Liberti played superbly against Harry Ketchum and Craig Danna to capture their First Flight 9 Wicket title for the first time.

Tournament Manager John Warlick along with Gail Rubin worked enormously hard to provide all players wonderful breakfasts and lunches each day and a GREAT courtside Italian dinner Sunday night. Bob Kroeger was the TD and Scheduler. Plans are to move the 2014 9 Wicket Nationals to another region of the country as part of a program to build regional competition and offer local players a chance for the National title. So far Kansas City, Kansas and Pasadena, California have shown strong interest. If you are interested in putting on the 2014 Nationals, please contact Michael Rumbin, 9 Wicket Committee Chairman to discuss your proposal.

Think about entering a 9 Wicket Croquet regional or national event. You will find the game offers opportunities to use all the tactical skills and strategic analysis of American 6 Wicket Croquet. Since there is a degree of chance built into each shot you just might get lucky against a better player and walk home with the trophy. This year the courts featured some very challenging playing surfaces including several hills, bare spots, and depressions. In my opinion, 9 Wicket Croquet has always been a game played in an irregular grass area that adds a dimension of "risk" and "chance" with each shot. Reading the court is as much a part of the 9 wicket game as knowing how to play the fairway and greens in golf. It's the type of croquet this author was brought up on and fondly remembers!

Championship Singles

1. George Cochran



2. Bob Kroeger
3. Stephen Morgan
3. Mike Gibbons
5. Reid Fleming
6. Sandy Knuth Walsh
6. Roy Morgan
6. Matt Griffith
6. Bill Mead
6. John Warlick
11. Ray Liberti
11. Bill Trower

First Flight Singles

1. Harry Ketchum



John Warlick, Harry Ketchum, Bob Kroeger

2. Gail Rubin
3. Gerald Shugar
4. Pat Muir
5. Dale Locke

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Championship Flight Doubles

1. George Cochran/John Warlick



John Warlick, George Cochran

2. Bob Kroeger/ Reid Fleming
3. Stephen Morgan/Roy Morgan
4. Bill Mead/Jasmine Morgan
5. Mike Gibbons/Cynthia Gibbons
5. Matt Griffith/Sandy Knuth Walsh

First Flight Doubles

1. Bill Trower/Ray Liberti



Bill Trower, Ray Liberti

2. Harry Ketchum/Craig Danna
3. Gail Rubin/Pat Muir
4. Dale Locke/Gerald Shugar