

2013 USCA Golf Croquet National Championships

September 22-25, 2013

Lake Toxaway, NC Area

The 2013 USCA Golf Croquet National Championships were contested September 22-25 at the Lake Toxaway, Burlingame, Sapphire Valley, and Cedar Creek clubs. This was the first major tournament held in North Carolina's southern highlands since the days of the Chattooga Challenge, marking national recognition of the USCA's fastest-growing area.

The entry was small, limited to 16 players because of the number of available courts within a reasonable distance. But it was a strong field, thanks in part to the immediately preceding Toxaway Mountain Challenge exhibition. Ben Rothman, Rich Lamm, and David Bent, all ranked in North America's top five, were joined by world #6 Stephen Mulliner and past champions Sherif Abdelwahab, Jeff Soo, and Leo McBride.

With only four days for the tournament the format was set at singles blocks of 4, all players advancing to a best-of-3 knockout, and doubles as a straight best-of-3 knockout from the start. The singles blocks were therefore basically a warm-up event. In block play there's no better time than the first round for upsets. Sandy Knuth, George Olson, and Bill Daigle proved the point with first-round wins over Rothman, Lamm, and Mulliner, respectively. McBride was the only player to survive the blocks undefeated.

Singles blocks were followed by the doubles quarterfinals. All four matches went according to seeding, with only Roy Gee and Jimmy Huff managing to take a game from their higher-seeded opponents (Bent and McBride).

The first round of the singles knockout also saw all higher-seeded players advance. Johnny Mitchell won the first game 7-6 against McBride, but lost momentum as McBride closed 7-5, 7-3. Knuth came tantalizingly close to a first game win over Mulliner, the latter winning 7-6, 7-3.

The quarterfinals featured tight matches plus an upset as Gee knocked off the top-seeded Mulliner, 7-6, 2-7, 7-6. Soo took the first game from Lamm 7-4, but Lamm advanced with wins of 7-4 and 7-5. The #4 and #5 seeds, Bent and Abdelwahab, played a suitably tight match, the latter winning 7-6, 7-6. Only Rothman had a comfortable win, advancing 7-3, 7-4 over McBride.

All players knocked out of the first two singles rounds were eligible for the "Y" consolation knockout. With split venues communication was a challenge, and the draw for the Y was thrown into disarray when some players opted not to play. Soo, the TD, opted for maximum participation and re-did the draw on the fly, a decision unpopular with some players but one that allowed the Y to progress with a minimum of waiting.

Both of the doubles semi-finals went to three games, but again there were no upsets as top seeds Mulliner and Lamm beat Soo and Hurst 7-2, 5-7, 7-4, while #2 seeds Rothman and Abdelwahab beat Bent & McBride 5-7, 7-4, 7-5.

Rothman and Abdelwahab earned spots in both finals as the latter advanced past Gee 7-5, 7-4, while defending champion Rothman defeated 2011 champion Lamm 7-2, 6-7, 7-5.

Finals day started with standing water on the lawns at Lake Toxaway. Fortunately the heaviest rain had already moved through, and thanks to the excellent drainage the lawns were playable shortly after the scheduled start time. The singles final was a highly competitive match between the two doubles partners, contrasting Abdelwahab's crowd-pleasing hard clearance and hoop shots with Rothman's precision play. Despite the lingering rain a good crowd was on hand to enjoy the finals, and they were treated to a display of excellent shooting intermixed with subtle tactics as Rothman prevailed 7-5, 6-7, 7-5 to repeat as singles champion.

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On lawn #2 Mulliner had won the Y final, 7-6, 7-5 over Soo. The tournament then wrapped up with the doubles final. Rothman and Abdelwahab continued their high level of play, winning the first game 7-2. Mulliner and Lamm made an effective countercharge in game 2, but the defending champions then closed out the match 7-5.

Rothman thus extends his remarkable and unprecedented run of holding all six USCA national titles simultaenously, and has now won a record 14 national singles and doubles titles overall.

The tournament was managed by Western NC District President Michael Albert, and directed by Jeff Soo. Assistance came from many dedicated volunteers at the host venues.

--Jeff Soo
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Championship Singles

1. Ben Rothman
2. Sherif Abdelwahab
3. Rich Lamm
3. Roy Gee
5. Stephen Mulliner
6. Jeff Soo
7. Leo McBride
8. David Bent
9. Jimmy Huff (WD)
9. Robert Hurst
9. Bill Daigle
12. Cheryl Bromley
13. George Olson
14. Johnny Mitchell
15. Sandy Knuth
15. Bill Bromley

Championship Doubles

1. Ben Rothman & Sherif Abdelwahab
2. Stephen Mulliner & Rich Lamm
3. David Bent & Leo McBride
3. Jeff Soo & Robert Hurst
5. Roy Gee & Jimmy Huff
5. Johnny Mitchell & Sandy Knuth
5. Cheryl Bromley & Bill Bromley
5. George Olson & Bill Daigle