

NEW YORK CROQUET CLUB CLAYTON CUP
Central Park, New York
June 12-15, 2014



For several years now, I have been studying the art of reading the minds of others. Simply put, that's called: mind reading. Scientifically, it's actually called the exact same thing, but one way or another, I have become quite good at it. And I'm not talking about the easy stuff - you know, like when I look at my girlfriend and just know that she is thinking: you are such an idiot. No, I have become a Mentalist!

That being said, it struck me that this year's NYCC Clayton Cup would prove to be the perfect playground within which to practice my art. The tournament itself is somewhat straightforward. Played over the span of four days upon the four Central Park lawns, this year found three Flights of Singles and two in Doubles, the First Flight Doubles being of the Waterford format. But what does make this setting so challenging stems from the fact that the activity beyond the facility's gates often distracts one's attention from the croquet action itself. See, and I know what you are thinking already, it's not so much the stabbings and terrorist threats, which most people think occur on a day to day basis in New York, but the infestation of dogs, the yells from dog owners, the road races, the race announcers and the unfettered sunbathing which can only distract a player from the next intended roquet.

For example, in the Championship Flight Singles Semi-Finals, I had the pleasure of playing against the honorable George Blake. George (2) is a gentleman who does so much not only in assisting within the tournament, but throughout the entire NYCC Season. George, among his other duties, runs the well-attended Instructional Program, and I have no doubt that there is a lesson included that involves with dealing with outside distractions. My problem with George? Not only does he think with an accent, but apparently forms his thoughts with long words and forms strategy based predominantly upon Association Rules theories. (Run me this race nearby be not my forte...may I gambit a fourth corner attack neverthenonless!) Reading his mind eventually gave me a headache, and thus I ended the game quickly with a 26-7 victory. In the other Semi, Norris Settlemyre (-2) and Rich Curtis (-2) both proved to be too easy to read, predominantly because there was no reason to try. Both pretty much aired their thoughts with freedom, Rich's words a bit more enthusiastic (“#@*&%@*”) than Norris's constant “Dagnabit” comments. While Norris would methodically win that match (14-13), he would eventually fall to Mr. Mind Reader (-2.5) in the 26-9 Final.

In the Championship Flight Doubles Final I was thinking, since I was playing within it as well, that this would be a fantastic time to really delve into the complex minds of others. Maybe even try some mind control! I might use this advantage to artistically develop a strategy which would make a significant difference upon the slow but reliable lawns. Well, not so much. I was playing with Lynda Sudderberg (7), certainly the sexiest player I had partnered with all weekend, and with Doug Moore (1) and Peter Timmins (5) the only team standing between us and the trophy...and I was psyched! I began by focusing on the mind of Doug, and after many minutes of concentration, I came up with a shocking revelation: there was actually no brain activity at all, at least none that had the slightest thing to do with croquet tactics. I turned my attention to Peter and, for different reasons, found pretty much the same result! Confused by the opponents, I began an attempt to read the mind of my partner, someone whose attention would certainly be somewhat similar to my own. Instead of the expected, I got: Oh, it's my turn...I wonder what John will think when I miss this wicket...I really liked those red shoes I saw yesterday at Macys! While Lynda and I would eventually win the match 19-15, I was beginning to wonder if the brain waves of all croquet players changed once they crossed that enticing boundary line.

It's obviously tough being a Mentalist, but even though I was playing at the same time, I did have some good vibes and was offered a wonderful practice opportunity by glancing at the First Flight Singles Finals. To begin with, young David Isaacs (8), who did a phenomenal job of assisting with both set-up and take-down of all of the courts, had plenty on his mind. Here's what I read: “I'm too dead to attack right now. I wonder if that girl on the nearby field would ever talk to me. If she did, I couldn't bring her to my place. Wait, I've got garbage all over my place. Maybe I should attack anyway. Oh yeah...I can clean some deadness! And my place! Where did she go?” Naturally, David lost both the girl and the game, but I do give credit to Peter Timmins, who won the Flight (15-14) with a sense of renewed energy and focus. While Peter was recently blessed with a beautiful daughter, he lost the love of his life during the process. In retrospect, I had no right trying to try to read his thoughts. And his feelings are those beyond my understanding or comprehension. There was not a Member of the NYCC that did not share the joy of his victory or fail to appreciate the great attitude he exhibited throughout the tournament. As an afterthought, David Isaacs did win the First Flight Waterford Doubles, Carla Rueck came in a close runner-up and Martine Fournage

worked hard to gain her Third Place Finish. All three of these players work actively for the Club and it was a nice sweep in many ways.

In regard to the Second Flight Singles, I stopped paying 'mental' attention once the charts were done. Leo Leither (9) should not have (apparently) been in that Flight, as demonstrated by his 15-10 victory over Carla Rueck in the Finals. He was not the only 9-handicapper, but the strongest, and I sorta knew he would win. But numbers very often dictate flighting. Remember how I sometimes know what my girlfriend is thinking, mentioned in the first paragraph? Well, I know Leo was thinking the same thing once he read the charts. Sorry to both, but congrats to Leo. Next year I am sure he will have a whole different array of less comfortable thoughts.

Overall, the best mental read I got the entire week came from the entire field on Friday morning, when the rains came and play was canceled for the day. Surprisingly, the vibes were of acceptance rather than annoyance, and all play continued the next day without significant changes. The social events went without a hitch, and as is the tradition of the Clayton Cup, laughter was spread equally from within and beyond the Central Park brick walls.

Sara Low, the extraordinary President of the NYCC, sent out a wonderful thank-you letter to everyone who had an influence in the running of this historic event. I do not have the energy to copy all of the names, but all of the participants thank everyone who made this event so wonderful. Special thanks, to those not already mentioned, go out to Karen Kaplan, Rebeca Bergofsky and our grounds guru, Norris (Mr. Sand) Settlemyre. The NYCC hopes that everyone can be in NY in September for another amazing Osborn Cup. And in case anyone is worried, I have stopped reading minds...there is too much enjoyment without such a distraction.

~John C. Osborn

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT SINGLES

1. John Osborn
2. Norris Settlemyre
3. Rich Curtis
3. George Blake
5. David McCoy
6. Doug Moore

FIRST FLIGHT SINGLES

1. Peter Timmins
2. David Isaacs
3. Sara Low
3. Steve Grassbaugh
5. Temp Peck
5. Lynda Sudderberg
7. Rebeca Bergofsky
8. John Woodside
9. Chris Kaas
9. Cindy Bagby

SECOND FLIGHT SINGLES

1. Leo Leither
2. Carla Rueck
3. Bill Chen
3. Karen Heckman
5. Martine Fournage

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT DOUBLES

1. John Osborn-Lynda Sudderberg
2. Doug Moore-Peter Timmins
3. Rich Curtis-Sara Low
4. Norris Settlemyre-John Woodside
5. David McCoy-Chris Kaas
6. George Blake-Temp Peck

FIRST FLIGHT WATERFORD DOUBLES

1. David Isaacs
2. Carla Rueck
3. Martine Fournage
4. Karen Heckman
5. Rebeca Bergofsky
6. Leo Leither
7. Steve Grassbaugh
8. Karen Kaplan