

USCA 9 Wicket National Championship

September 19-21, 2014

Kansas City, MO

I'm Matt Griffith and I was the organizer and Tournament Director for the 9 Wicket Nationals for 2014. 1980 was when I first heard of a croquet tournament. It was held in a pasture near the Kansas City Airport. It cost was \$12 to enter and you got a t-shirt, party Friday night, band Saturday night and all the beer you could drink. Plus there were a couple of hundred people and half of them were girls. A single guy in his twenties couldn't ask for any more. That was the beginning of my croquet career. I began playing more after that first year and sometime in the mid 80's I was downtown and spied what I thought at the time, a perfect place to have a tournament. Now 30 years later it became a reality.

The 9 Wickets Nationals were held in one of the more famous public parks in Kansas City. Liberty Memorial. Home of the WWI Museum. Situated in downtown Kansas City on top a hill close to the Country Club Plaza and Westport.

While practicing on set up day a photographer from the Kansas City Star stopped to see what we were doing, He remembers meeting me before and followed several of us around taking our pictures. He caught George Cochran doing a big roll shot with the War Memorial in the background. Much to our surprise that reporter ran a huge picture in the Friday morning paper. It was amazing how many people saw that picture and the buzz it started.

I had sent out press releases to everyone I could find online. I got a call from Rob Collins of Channel 4 and he wanted to know what time we were going to be there on Friday morning. When we arrived at 7am to set up, Rob and his crew were there. They ran promos on air all morning and did 3 live interviews (2 with me and 1 with George Cochran). I was able to find out that one of the morning anchors loves croquet. I did a live throw down to him and hope he will be a new recruit on the court.

Channel 41 also had contacted me and arrived just as I had some time between games. We did another interview and shot a lot of footage. We even attached a mini camera to the head of a mallet to get some action shots. They put our piece in a segment they call the "List" Things to do or see that weekend and we were first on the list.

I have never seen so many people stop to watch or make the trip downtown come see croquet. Many people were talked to and cards were passed out to all. We heard lots of stories about their group that plays regularly. Many had no idea there is a USCA. People working in nearby buildings came over at lunch to see what was going on with these people in whites. There was quite a lot of energy generated in KC about croquet that weekend.

Championship Flight Singles consisted of 2 blocks of 5 players. There were some hard fought battles with no one going undefeated. The top two were Doug Moore and Paul Miller. Both were attending their first 9 wicket nationals. Paul Miller had a great game against defending National champion George Cochran winning 27-20 to make it to the finals. It was Doug Moore vs Matt Griffith in the other semi-finals. Matt came back after being way down to defeat Doug 32-26.



The final featured a Chernobyl opening by Griffith, which is particularly powerful in nine wicket due to the ease of scoring two wickets for two bonus shots. After a number of passes, the action did get started and Miller established control of the game. The game will likely be remembered for Miller's decision to run the clearing wicket in last turns with the lead and Griffith partner dead. Miller pretty much decimated a field of veterans while playing in only his second USCA event.

Championship Doubles featured 4 teams. We played a double round robin with the top 2 teams moving on to the finals. It came down to the final block match between Doug Moore/Paul Miller and Don Oakley/Matt Griffith. Winner moves on to the final. Doug and Paul came out on top. Winners of the last two

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doubles titles George Cochran and John Warlick didn't disappoint us again this year. The great strategy of George and some great key hit-ins by John sealed the victory. Paul had a chance on last turn to score the tying wicket and just missed a 20 foot shot. Congrats on the 3-peat guys.

First Flight singles had 2 blocks of 6 players each. In one semifinal we had block winner Michael Kearns playing second in the block Bill Berg. The other semifinal pitted the 2 number one seeds in the blocks against each other. Greg Adams defeated Ron Millican to make it to the finals. In the finals Michael got into deadness trouble. Greg was able to keep him dead allowing only long shots going into the doubles. Greg made what could have been a fatal mistake. He miscounted what the wicket count was and cleared one of Michael's balls in last turn. Greg did prevail and won by 2.

In the First Flight Doubles we had 5 teams that had a 3 – 2 record. They beat each other up and it came down to net points. Newcomers Ellen and William Fox narrowly beat out Gail Rubin and Jim Ratzlaff for the last spot. Greg Adams and Ron Millican were able to hold off long enough and win their game. Deborah Millican and Jodi Adams fought a good match against Nathan Oberg and Ed Mondt but couldn't overcome the deficit. The finals had seasoned veterans Ron Millican and Greg Adams against first time USCA players Ed Mondt and Nathan Oberg. Nathan and Ed secured the win. They may be new to the USCA but they are veterans of 9 wicket tournament play.

Nathans dad, Ob and Ed were 2 of the original group that started that tournament I started playing in. Nathan has been playing since he could walk. The first tournament was in 1973 and is considered to be the longest running tournament in the country. It is amazing when you consider how full circle things have come from those beer drinking games. Several top players started in Kansas City including Jerry Stark and Jim Bast.

The weather could not have been any better for the tournament. Low 80's with a slight breeze. The conditions were "Bob Kroger perfect". Decent lawns but rough enough they caused many jumps and challenges throughout play.

The opening reception and tournament dinner were held at Kactus Creek Croquet Club. Staying with KC tradition we had Smokehouse BBQ for dinner. Lots of laughs, good fellowship, and golf croquet was had by all.

The event is slated to head to California at some point, but many of the Northeastern players were pitching the concept of going to Washington D.C. and replicating the same public concept at the National Mall. Many of the other players talked about coming back to Kansas City again with its central location and hospitality.

This was the seventh edition of the USCA Nine Wicket National Championship since the re-introduction of the event in 2008. It has visited Kansas City (2008-2011, 2014), Philadelphia (2012 and West Palm Beach (2013). Entries for each 9W Nationals: 2008 - 40, 2009 - 26, 2010 - 23, 2011 - 24, 2012 - 13, 2013 - 14, 2014 - 26.

I want to thank everyone that attended this year. I also want to thank everyone who helped me but three by name. Steve Jackson with the set up and helping with the scheduling. Ellie Kemp, that without her we wouldn't have eaten or had cold drinks at the courts. She is a new croquet player and one of the biggest ambassadors to the sport. She talked to countless new people over the 3 days. A very special thanks to Wanda Jackson for making wonderful trophies for us. Truly one of a kind.

I want to thank our sponsor for their help, North Meadow Croquet, makers of croquet equipment. Several new friends were made and lots of croquet was played. I hope to see you all on the courts soon.

Matt Griffith
Tournament Director
Midwest Regional Vice President

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Final Results

Championship Singles

- 1 Paul Miller
- 2 Matt Griffith
- 3 George Cochran
- 4 Doug Moore
- John Warlick
- Greg Clouse
- Dave Nelson
- Dylan Goodwin
- Roy Morgan
- Don Oakley



Matt Griffith, Paul Miller

Championship Doubles

- 1 George Cochran/ John Warlick
- 2 Doug Moore/ Paul Miller
- Matt Griffith/ Don Oakley
- Roy Morgan/ Dave Nelson



John Warlick, George Cochran, Doug Moore, Paul Miller

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First Flight Singles

- 1 Greg Adams
- 2 Michael Kerns
- Bill Berg
- Ron Millican
- Gail Rubin
- Steve Jackson
- Jodi Adams
- Josh Reed
- Deborah Millican
- Amy Romines
- Jim Ratzlaff
- Wanda Jackson



Greg Adams, Matt Griffith

First Flight Doubles

- 1 Ed Mondt/ Nathan Oberg
- 2 Greg Adams/ Ron Millican
- Deborah Millican/ Jodi Adams
- Ellen Fox/ William Fox
- Gail Rubin/ Jim Ratzlaff
- Steve Jackson/ Wanda Jackson
- Josh Reed/ Amy Romines



Nathan Oberg, Matt Griffith, Ed Mondt

