

# USCA Association Laws National Championships

## April 7-12, 2014

### Rancho Mirage, CA

Mission Hills Croquet Club hosted the Association Laws National Championships as the last big tournament of the winter season in Rancho Mirage, California. Unlike many desert tournaments, the sun stayed up well into supper time allowing for three hour time limits and many games going past 7 pm. After the great attendance at the Selection Eights, Association Croquet is booming in North America with 36 players arriving to compete for the title. A scant few players desired a separate flight, but they were convinced to play all together so as to avoid playing the same opponents for the entire six-day event. This year's tournament featured two consolation singles events and consolation doubles for those who craved more play after elimination from the main event.

Doubles was run as a best-of-three knockout from the very first morning as has become custom. The seven and a half hour time limits did come into play for a few tight match-ups. Charlie Smith and young Charlie Fleming were able to take down the recent US team members Stuart Lawrence and Mike Taylor. Charlie Smith scored a triple in the first game, Stuart and Mike pegged out in game two and in last turns, Charlie Fleming took a break to the peg and pegged out to win 22-21 in the third game of the marathon match. Another stunningly close match went to time between a team of USCA officers Martyn Selman and Johnny Mitchell and the team resembling 19<sup>th</sup> century gold prospectors Rory Kelley and Rich Curtis. Neither team pegged out in a game as the series used every minute allotted and significant overtime. Martyn and Johnny took game one 23-22 but lost the next two 20-16 and 21-16 in the longest match of the week.



The singles tournament began with four blocks where each player had eight games before the top 16 were seeded into a best-of-three ladder. It was a harried schedule with players being pushed onto lawns as soon as they opened up and some players getting two singles games while others had as many as five in one day. After three days the doubles was down to the top eight teams and the block results became clear. There were a few upsets with Paul Bennett taking the top spot in his block with eight wins and four triples over Jim Bast (seven wins, one triple) and Brian Cumming matching the effort with four triples in his undefeated streak. Jeff Soo stayed atop

his group with seven wins and three triples while Ben Rothman took top honors with eight wins and eight triples. This continued Ben's streak of triple peels from his previous win at the Desert Classic in January. After block play, Ben had 20 consecutive triples which put him ahead of Robert Fulford (19) and tied him for the world record with Chris Clarke.

The last four seeds in the knockout were wildcards determined by wins, triples, head-to-head and net points. Martyn Selman earned one wild card by separating from the peleton with five wins in his eight games, but there were six players with a 4-4 record vying for the final three playoff spots. With none of the players scoring triple peels and very few having played each other, net points proved paramount. Mike Taylor, despite a disappointing showing in the block, had 34 positive net points and got a spot followed by Rory Kelley with 22 points. Relative newcomer Mike Todorovich showed that he has turned experience into results with a critical 26-0 victory in his last block game giving him 21 net points and the final spot in the knockout. Rich Curtis, Ron Hendry and Tim Hanks were denied playoff spots, but they started the consolation Plate Event with the most wins in the group.

The top seeds won their matches with little interaction with the exception of Jeff Soo. Jeff dropped game one to Rory Kelley 26-24 but leveled the match with a quick triple +26tp and won game three 26-20 to move on. Ben and Paul progressed with two triples while Brian defeated Martyn Selman with the most important letter, "W". Ben continued the streak past Bob Van Tassell and claimed a new world record with 24 consecutive triple peels. After defeating Jim Bast with two triples of his own, Brian Cumming took game one against Ben Rothman and ended the streak. Ben rallied in game two of the semi-final +25tp, but Brian chose to triple peel Ben's ball and peg it out in game three of the semi-final. Ben failed to get going off of contact and chose to hang out near corner four while Brian attempted to use his two on one advantage to win. Brian built a very difficult break from the corner four area and had the finish in his sights. Attempting to get a trivial rush after the hoop, Brian stuffed 3-back and relieved his mallet of the bounds of gravity for a short moment before grumbling off the court. Ben

was able to build a break from this difficult position and move onto the final by the skin of his teeth (+6 otp).

On the other half of the ladder, Doug Grimsley encountered a hard charging Leo Nikora in the first round. Doug took game one +16 without any peels and Leo answered +17 in similar fashion. In game three Leo managed to peg out one of Doug's balls and used his two on one advantage to get all the way to rover. Facing almost certain defeat, Doug attempted nearly the longest possible roquet from just out of corner two at Leo who was just a yard or two out of corner four. Leo had a rush to rover and only the one hoop to make before pegging out, but Doug hit the 120 foot shot and finished 26-23 to move on leaving Leo just short of the quarter-finals. Doug couldn't keep the magic going and fell to Paul Bennett in two games. After messing up his first break, Paul finished a quadruple peel to take game one +16qp and failed to get any peels in game two +26. Sherif Abdelwahab showed he is more than just an impressive single ball shot with six wins in the block and his first triple peel since the year 2000 against Stuart Lawrence in the first round. Stuart fired back with a triple of his own and in the rubber match, Sherif pegged out Stuart's ball and managed a very subtle two on one to victory 26-22 against the accomplished Mr. Lawrence. Jeff recovered from his first round speed bump and defeated Sherif handily +26tp +19 for a spot in the semi-finals against Paul Bennett. Due to time constraints, Jeff and Paul only finished one game on the day before the final which Jeff won 26-11. This semi-final had to wait until after the doubles finished on the last day of play.

In the doubles ladder team Charlie continued to push time to the limits. In the second round Paul and Sherif offered worthy competition despite losing game one 26-9. Sherif's disruptive hit ins allowed Paul to get a finishing turn for a +17tp in game two, while game three was an exciting back and forth. Eventually the hit ins from Paul and Sherif surpassed any interesting tactical decisions they came up with and team Charlie could not keep up, losing 26-19 after more than six hours. Paul and Sherif matched up against the top seeded team Ben Rothman and Doug Grimsley in the semi-finals after the latter dispatched Rich Curtis and Rory Kelley in two games. Rothman and Grimsley have won four out the last five national championships and despite moving into the semi-finals with three triple peels in four games, they lost their mojo. Neither Ben nor Doug could buy a hit-in and Paul and Sherif had no interest in giving any extra shots to the regular US team players. Paul finished game one cleanly +26tp and despite a hit and 9-hoop run by Rothman in game two, Sherif calmly hit in and finished +17 to move onto the final.

With Danny Huneycutt absent, Jim Bast fortunately talked the tax-burdened Rich Lamm into playing doubles during an extremely busy work week. Having traded one MacRob player for another, Jim's team sailed smoothly past locals Nick Gray and Cameron Evans as well as the tough Bob Van Tassell and Leo Nikora in four games with one triple for each team member. The semi-finals offered stiffer competition with a marquis match-up against Jeff Soo and Brian Cumming. Jeff and Brian had also had four games without much of a challenge leading up to the semis. Sadly the match did not live up to the hype as Jeff and Brian completely controlled game one to win +25 with a triple peel by Mr. Soo. Game two was a much better battle, but Jeff and Brian avoided game three with a narrow four point victory.

In the consolation events, players could play as much as they wanted on the open lawns. Nearly half of the tournament players took advantage of the opportunity to get in extra games and the top eight players were seeded into a Plate Event knockout. Eventually Leo Nikora and Jim Butts rose to the top of the plate ladder and had an incredibly close game. Jim got around to peg and four-back before pulling a muscle in his back. Jim managed to keep playing, but failed to make four-back on several finishing turns. Leo crept back into the game and won 25-23 in last turns. Consolation doubles featured the return of the originally scheduled team of Charlie Smith and Steve Johnston. After attending to a family illness Steve played in the consolation events and was victorious over Toni Kemp and Richard Wright in the consolation doubles final. Charlie Smith had enough wins to qualify for the Zed Event final against Peter Bach, but after the consolation doubles and a few drinks, the pair decided to settle it with a shoot off. Charlie Smith took the Zed Event trophy home after an impressive pegout from the North boundary.

The doubles final was an amazing show of hit ins with no successful peeling turns in two tight games. Paul and Sherif displayed fantastic timing with a hit at nearly every critical juncture in the match. The best hit-in of the tournament (despite it being tactical suicide) was in game two. With Jeff and Brian joined near corner three, Paul decided to play his ball (just inches out of corner four) in an attempted roquet of Sherif's ball in corner two. While it would not have been as easy to pick up, two balls in corner two would still give Jeff a good chance to build the break. But Paul lined up the nearly maximum 125 foot shot and hit, preventing Jeff any chance of a build. Paul turned the miraculous hit into an all around break and won the match +14, +24 giving Paul and Sherif each his first Association National Championship title.

Continuing the singles semi-final, Paul tried to keep momentum going against Jeff in game two. Each player had chances to finish, but they both failed triple attempts and handed control over to their opposition. Jeff eventually regained control of his game and won 26-21 for a spot in the final against Rothman. Despite sitting on the sidelines all day, Ben came out hitting with a third turn break around. Jeff hit in fourth turn and failed to get the top going so he just set a leave after nine hoops. Ben failed to repeat his hit in success and Jeff finished with a delayed triple +17tp. In game two, Ben went around and Jeff hit only this time Jeff got the peels going. Jeff pegged out Ben's ball and took advantage with the two on one. Rothman made a very difficult hoop shot at hoop one after rolling well short of position, but his next roll shot went too far and he went out of bounds by six inches up near corner two. Jeff prepared for a battle of attrition, sending Ben away and joining near a hoop, but early in that battle Jeff left Ben a double target joined at Ben's hoop. Ben went for the heroic hit in, but missed giving Jeff the game-winning three-ball break. Jeff took it around with no knee-knocking shots and won his first ever Association singles title +17tp, +12tpo completing his career grand slam. Jeff has now won all six of the six-wicket National Championship titles and he is now tied at 15 with Ben Rothman for the most all-time National Championships.

-Ben Rothman, TD

### Championship Singles

1. Jeff Soo



- 2. Ben Rothman
- 3. Brian Cumming
- 3. Paul Bennett
- 5. Doug Grimsley
- 5. Jim Bast
- 5. Sherif Abdelwahab
- 5. Bob Van Tassell
- 9. Charlie Smith
- 9. Stuart Lawrence
- 9. Leo Nikora
- 9. Peter Bach
- 9. Martyn Selman
- 9. Mike Taylor
- 9. Rory Kelley
- 9. Mike Todorovich
- 17. Tim Hanks
- 17. Ron Hendry
- 17. Rich Curtis
- 20. Simon Jenkins
- 20. Eric Sawyer
- 20. Rhys Thomas
- 20. Nick Gray
- 20. Johnny Mitchell
- 20. Charlie Fleming
- 26. Jim Hanks
- 26. Steve Mossbrook

- 26. Jim Butts
- 29. Mary Rodeberg
- 29. Daniel Pailas
- 29. Patrick Dugan
- 32. Cameron Evans
- 32. Bob Morford
- 32. Toni Kemp

### Plate Event Singles

1. Leo Nikora



- 2. Jim Butts
- 3. Martyn Selman
- 3. Mike Todorovich
- 5. Simon Jenkins
- 5. Charlie Fleming
- 5. Daniel Pailas
- 5. Steve Johnston

### Zed Event Singles

1. Charlie Smith



2. Peter Bach
3. Stuart Lawrence
4. Johnny Mitchell
5. Steve Mossbrook
6. Mary Rodeberg

### Consolation Doubles Event

1. Charlie Smith & Steve Johnston



2. Toni Kemp & Richard Wright
3. Cameron Evans & Nick Gray
3. Rory Kelley & Rich Curtis

### Championship Doubles

1. Paul Bennett & Sherif Abdelwahab



2. Jeff Soo & Brian Cumming
3. Ben Rothman & Doug Grimsley
3. Jim Bast & Rich Lamm
5. Bob Van Tassell & Leo Nikora
5. Charlie Smith & Charlie Fleming
5. Jim Butts & Peter Bach
5. Rory Kelley & Rich Curtis
9. Martyn Selman & Johnny Mitchell
9. Eric Sawyer & Rhys Thomas
9. Simon Jenkins & Steve Mossbrook
9. Tim Hanks & Jim Hanks
9. Stuart Lawrence & Mike Taylor
9. Cameron Evans & Nick Gray
9. Mike Todorovich & Mary Rodeberg
9. Patrick Dugan & Daniel Pailas
17. Toni Kemp & Richard Wright