

# 2014 USCA GOLF CROQUET NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

## December 9-13, 2014

### Rancho Mirage, CA



The beautiful haven that is Mission Hills Croquet Club underwent a transformation for the 2014 Golf Croquet National Championship as the much needed Hawaiian storm front dubbed the "Pineapple Express" rolled through California. Rain and wind brought on a chill that, while much warmer than most winter weather, disrupted visiting players who had hoped for warm Southern California sunshine. Thankfully, the storm did not slow the

tightly scheduled tournament. Championship players were expected to finish at least six games per day to allow for a possible playoff before the knockout ladder while First Flight was allowed a more feasible three to four games each day.

The Championship Flight had 20 of the best players to ever compete for the Golf Croquet title in America. Nine out of North America's current top ten GC players were present (Brian Cumming was the lone exception). Ben Rothman was chasing a three-peat in both singles and doubles, while former Champions Rich Lamm, Leo McBride and Sherif Abdelwahab were looking to keep him honest. All four US representatives for next year's GC World Championship were hoping to hone their skills before the ultimate test in New Zealand. In this game, even new players can excel quickly and newcomers Stephen Morgan, John Richardson of Georgetown, Ontario and Michael Albert looked for big upsets in their first Championship opportunity.

In the early rounds, even the defending champion showed a chink in his armor. Bruno Amby of Hawaii rode the Pineapple Express right over Ben Rothman for a (7-6) upset to start the tournament. Stephen Morgan followed up (7-6) giving Rothman two strikes on his first day. Local upstart Cameron Evans made his presence felt (7-5) against the veteran Ahab Dincer who doesn't get to play much during the year. Leo McBride dropped games to Mary Rodeberg, Matt Griffith and his compatriot John Richardson and nearly failed to make the playoffs until a timely victory over Sherif Abdelwahab (7-1). Abdelwahab took the top spot with just one loss while his brother Dincer and David Bent tied for the top spot in the second block. Dincer had many games 7-5 that were closer than they seem. At 5-5 against Michael Albert, Dincer was forced to shoot hoop 11 from the north boundary. Not only did he score the hoop from more than 30 feet, but he spun off of the stanchion at just the right speed and angle to curve around the peg and through hoop 12 for the victory!

2011 Champion Rich Lamm beat out Rothman by avoiding any upsets for the last bye of the 12 player knockout ladder. Six players tied with four wins for the final three spots in the ladder making net points paramount. Lucky Leos (McBride and Nikora) made it out with positive net points despite a 4-5 record and Peter Bach narrowly beat out Steve Mossbrook for the final spot while Bruno Amby and John Richardson gave up on the hopes that a less than .500 record would give them a shot at the title.

The First Flight had a third day to compile block results, but had a massive tie for the last playoff spot just the same. Michael Rumbin and newcomer Bill Fraser won their respective blocks without a single loss. Donna Dixon's block win over Welles Farago earned her second place despite an exact tie in wins and points and Patrick Dugan's impressive shooting streaks resulted in the fourth seed for the playoffs. Bob Morford stayed away from the pile-up with three wins, but five players tied for the last two spots. Sandra Knuth Walsh and Stephen Jackson were the lucky losers who made the cut on net points while locals Marilyn Morford, Tracey Roche and Gary Neal will have to wait for the Bob Riddell Golf Croquet tournament in April.

Championship Doubles was a best-of-three knockout from the beginning, just like the Association Laws Nationals, setting up great competition in the early rounds. Club President, Mary Rodeberg and Donna Dixon managed to upset Steve Mossbrook and John Richardson in two close games (7-5, 7-6) while Michael Albert and Sandra Knuth Walsh nearly knocked out Leo Nikora and Bruno Amby by forcing a deciding third game. Nick Gray and Cameron Evans used their local knowledge to edge out Peter Bach and Michael Rumbin (7-6, 7-2). The ranks and seeding were boringly accurate and all four of the top seeded teams won the quarter-finals in two games. The fifth seeded Matt Griffith and Carl Uhlman predictably posed the closest challenge to the fourth seeded Ahab Dincer and Stephen Morgan by taking the second game to the 13<sup>th</sup> hoop. Dincer and Morgan moved on to face the defending champs and won game two at the playoff hoop, but lost the other two games by a wide margin (7-2, 6-7, 7-3). David Bent and Leo McBride stayed out of reach against Rodeberg and Dixon (7-4, 7-4) while Rich Lamm and Eric Sawyer calmly out-paced Nikora and Amby (7-4, 7-5). The semi-final would not be so steady.

Leo McBride and David Bent took over 5-hours to defeat Rich Lamm and Eric Sawyer. After dropping game one 4-7, McBride and Bent tested the bounds of "reasonable dispatch" and traded epic clearances with Lamm and Sawyer to extend the match beyond the length of many Association Laws best-of-three matches. Lamm and Sawyer nearly won at the playoff hoop in game two, but after Lamm cleared Leo to the north boundary, McBride slowly rocked himself into a balanced position and swished the winning hoop. Game three was tied 3-3 when McBride took command and scored 7 all the way to position at 8. McBride took hoop 8 and Bent scored 9, leaving Lamm and Sawyer a few desperation shots before collapsing from the exhaustion.

First Flight Doubles was a runaway from the beginning. Patrick Dugan and Kansas player Stephen Jackson dominated the field. Ken Slaughter and Welles Farago offered the toughest game going to the playoff hoop, but otherwise Dugan and Jackson kept every team in check. Gary Neal and late addition Richard Kennedy made their way through block play with four wins and battled Susan Stiff and Tracey Roche in the semi-finals. Stiff and Roche nearly left the tournament after they lost game one (7-6) assuming they had single games instead of a best-of-three playoff. Game two was hotly contested (7-6) and game three was

heading for a 3-3 tie when a suspect shot created great drama. A hampered stroke was played without a referee present and the players did not agree ahead of time to ref the shot themselves. All players were close enough to see (or not see) the striker touch (or not touch) the opponent's ball in the backswing. The disagreement escalated and the Tournament Director became the referee-in-charge for the rest of the game. Neal and Kennedy managed to win 7-4, but no one seemed satisfied. Let this be a reminder to players to call a ref or determine which of the players is to make the ref call for any hampered stroke. If no referee is appointed, the striker makes the call and there can be no debate except for interpretation of the laws. Sadly, not all games have a winner.

The third night of the tournament featured a mini-golf style Crazy Croquet Challenge courtesy of Eric Sawyer. One court was divided into nine challenging hoops with sand traps, wooden penalty stakes, and some challenging terrain obstacles such as sprinklers, long grass and tree roots. Along with a silent auction and a cash bar, the event raised over \$4,000 for the Lee Olsen fund! The fund is used to help players who travel to play for team USA in various team events such as the Solomon Trophy, the Golf Croquet World Team Championships and the MacRobertson Shield.

While Peter Bach was happy to earn the final spot in the singles ladder, he quickly soured to see that he drew Ben Rothman first. Ben quickly dispatched Captain Bach (7-2, 7-6) and took out Ahab Dincer (7-4, 7-3) by making the most out of promoting his partner ball into scoring position from the previous hoop five times in two games. Ron Hendry upset Michael Albert in the closest match of the tournament (6-7, 7-5, 7-6) only to lose to Sherif Abdelwahab (7-2, 7-3). In the other half of the ladder Eric Sawyer charged from behind to defeat Leo Nikora (5-7, 7-6, 7-1) showing what a streaky game golf croquet can be. Eric went on to defeat his doubles partner Rich Lamm (7-2, 7-5) after Lamm tweaked his wrist on a hard clearance shot and having to resort to a game of finesse and blocking shots.

Leo McBride barely made the playoffs and lost his first playoff game (7-2) to Stephen Morgan. McBride recovered 3-1 in game two when he managed to get into a spat with his opponent. The tournament director had to become referee-in-charge to get the players to play without distracting each other in a silent match with great intensity. Morgan's game deteriorated when McBride forced him into a slow, quiet game and accused him of talking when the only sounds were grunts from nearby tennis players. McBride's focus got him into the semi-final (2-7, 7-3, 7-2), but his antics could not overcome his partner David Bent's superior shooting and he lost the very impressive show (7-6, 7-6).

Ben Rothman also played his doubles partner in the singles semi-final making the top four players the same in singles and doubles. The first game was a stupendous battle of clearances and long hoop shots scoring all the way to the next hoop. At the playoff hoop, Rothman hit his last chance to clear Sherif Abdelwahab from south of hoop 12 and all balls were soon on boundaries. Rothman missed a chance from the line and Abdelwahab had two balls near position to Rothman's one. Rather than clear Rothman to the near boundary, Abdelwahab smothered Rothman's only chance to defend the hoop, but Abdelwahab's smother got so close that they were touching. Rothman had the two balls conjoined one foot in-front of the hoop while the next ball to play had a clear three foot hoop shot. Rothman decided to go all-in and shot a drive shot towards the ball that prevented him from any defensive plays. Abdelwahab's ball caromed off the hoop and Rothman's ball dribbled through for the one-point victory. Rothman won game two with a 50-foot shot at the double target of

Abdelwahab's perfectly positioned ball and hoop 10 that scored the winning point (7-3).

The First Flight Doubles was a walk in the park for Pat Dugan and Stephen Jackson who continued their stampede and won in two clean games (7-5, 7-4) for the first National Championship for either player. Championship Doubles was incredibly close, with Leo McBride and David Bent making hoops from near boundaries and Bent even scored hoop 10 from hoop south of hoop 9, over 60 feet! Ben Rothman and Sherif Abdelwahab played from behind most of the match, but managed to tie game one 6-6 and after missing the clearance at the final hoop, McBride finally lost focus and missed an eight foot game-winner. Rothman made the next shot from 12 feet for the lucky victory. Bent continued to clear any threat in game two, but McBride had lost some of his magic touch and began to miss clearances and the few hoop shots he had. Abdelwahab's astoundingly hard-hit clearances forced Bent and McBride farther and farther and Rothman scored the winning hoop 12 for the doubles three-peat (7-6, 7-5).

Championship Singles showed what a little luck can do. While both Ben Rothman and David Bent had impressive clearances, Bent's occasionally knocked the opponent into the hoop itself and at hoop six, Rothman's failed clearance hit his own ball and managed to carom through the hoop by sheer accident. Rothman's jump shots and persistent 7-yard clearances earned him a secure lead and a Singles three-peat (7-2, 7-4). These are Ben Rothman's record 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> National Championships, putting him two ahead of living legend Jeff Soo.

The most exciting match of the day was the First Flight final. Both players had to show grit and make big comebacks to even get to the title bout. Michael Rumbin, while undefeated in the block play, dropped a game in each of his playoff matches, barely beating Stephen Jackson at the playoff hoop (7-5, 5-7, 7-6) in the first round. Rumbin then had to come from behind against Pat Dugan. The third game of the semifinal was delayed by darkness and Rumbin had to finish off the stone-cold-shooter on the final's day (6-7, 7-6, 7-5). Donna Dixon was dominated in her first playoff game, but recovered to beat Bob Morford (2-7, 7-6, 7-5). Bill Fraser survived dropping a game to Sandra Knuth Walsh (7-4, 4-7, 7-3) but lost two straight to the late rallying Dixon (7-4, 7-2). Dixon got revenge for the block loss to Rumbin with a statement game (7-1) but lost game two (4-7). Rumbin took away many of Dixon's easy shots, but her ability to stop shot and make long hoops smoothly gave her a convincing (7-3) victory in which she lead by as many as five points. This is not only Dixon's first Golf Croquet National Championship, it is her very first Golf Croquet tournament!

~Ben Rothman, Tournament Director

#### Champion Flight Singles

1. Ben Rothman
2. David Bent
3. Sherif Abdelwahab
3. Eric Sawyer
5. Ahab Dincer
5. Rich Lamm
5. Ron Hendry
5. Leo McBride
9. Michael Albert



Mary Rodeberg, Rich Lamm, Ben Rothman

- 9. Stephen Morgan, Plate Winner
- 9. Leo Nikora
- 9. Peter Bach
- 13. Steve Mossbrook.
- 14. Bruno Amby, Plate Runner-Up
- 14. John Richardson
- 16. Nick Gray
- 16. Matt Griffith
- 18. Cameron Evans
- 19. Carl Uhlman
- 19. Mary Rodeberg



Mary Rodeberg, Stephen Morgan, Ben Rothman

#### First Flight Singles

- 1. Donna Dixon
- 2. Michael Rumbin
- 3. Patrick Dugan
- 3. Bill Fraser
- 5. Welles Farago
- 5. Bob Morford.
- 5. Sandra Knuth Walsh
- 5. Stephen Jackson
- 9. Marilyn Morford
- 9. Tracey Roche
- 9. Gary Neal
- 12. Eric Harris
- 13. Ken Slaughter



Ben Rothman, Donna Dixon, Mary Rodeberg

#### Championship Doubles

- 1. Ben Rothman/Sherif Abdelwahab
- 2. David Bent/Leo McBride
- 3. Ahab Dincer/Stephen Morgan
- 3. Rich Lamm/Eric Sawyer
- 5. Matt Griffith/Carl Uhlman
- 5. Leo Nikora/Bruno Amby
- 5. Nick Gray/Cameron Evans
- 5. Mary Rodeberg/Donna Dixon
- 9. Peter Bach/Michael Rumbin
- 9. Michael Albert/Sandra Knuth Walsh



## 9. Steve Mossbrook/John Richardson

### First Flight Doubles

1. Patrick Dugan/Stephen Jackson
2. Gary Neal/Richard Kennedy
3. Susan Stiff/Tracey Roche
3. Eric Harris/Bill Fraser
5. Ken Slaughter/Welles Farago
5. Elaine Kennedy/Scott Smith
7. Bob Morford/Marylin Morford

Ben Rothman, Sherif Abdelwahab, Mary Rodeberg



Ben Rothman, Patrick Dugan, Stephen Jackson,  
Mary Rodeberg