

Western North Carolina Pro-Am

September 23, 2015

Lake Toxaway, NC

Sherif Abdelwahab and Richard Boger were winners at the inaugural Western North Carolina (WNC) Pro-Am. The one-day event paired eight visiting "pro" players against sixteen local "ams" in a combination Team USA fundraiser, playing clinic, social mixer, and all-around good time for participants and spectators alike. After the Pro-Am competition, the fun and fellowship continued with a Crazy Croquet contest, silent auction, and cocktail party. In all, the combined events netted over \$22,000, enough to fully fund the team traveling to England for the 2016 Golf Croquet World Teams Championship (GCWTC).

The seed was planted in June, during the Golf Croquet (GC) National Championships, also held here at Lake Toxaway Country Club. Abdelwahab had the idea of holding another top-level GC tournament later in the season, to give the Team USA selectors a final chance to look at the candidates for the GCWTC before the selection deadline in October. He suggested a venue in Florida. Local croquet bigwigs George Enochs (co-founder with his wife Jane of the Lake Toxaway Mallet Club) and Michael Albert (co-founder with his wife Karen of the Croquet programs at Cedar Creek Racquet Club and Trillium Links and Lake Club, and current WNC District President) replied, why not here? Jeff Soo suggested adding a Pro-Am, similar to the one he had organized in conjunction with the 2012 Solomon Trophy. That event had proved to be a big hit with "pros" and "ams" alike. The Western NC District, where GC is played by around 1400 players at ten clubs, is the obvious place for a GC version.

Albert volunteered to head up the Pro-Am and immediately set to work. Aided by the marketing expertise of Highlands Country Club members Dick Boger and Mary Ann Hardman, Albert contacted all ten of the area croquet clubs, requesting an opportunity to appear before the members to make a presentation in support of the Pro-Am. Despite the short notice, he was able to schedule personal appearances at eight of the ten clubs, garnering commitments to play in the Pro-Am as well as independent donations. Nancy Albers, member of the Trillium Links and Lake Club, used her extensive network of local business connections to drum up items for the silent auction. Karen Weihs, renowned local artist and also a Trillium member, offered to create and donate an original croquet-themed painting for sealed bid at the auction. West Coast GC maven Eric Sawyer provided inspiration and advice on setting up a "Crazy Croquet" course, and Don Oakley of Oakley Woods Croquet provided needed equipment, as well as donating a mallet for the silent auction.

The Lake Toxaway Country Club (LTCC) graciously offered to host the event. They have been stalwarts of the GC community in their dedication to promoting the sport and making their venue available to host tournaments from the local level to the Nationals. It is this type of attitude that is quickly making LTCC and the WNC Mountain district the GC destination in America.

The competition was scheduled into six rounds, with a lunch break in the middle. Each "pro" played all six rounds and each "am" played in alternate rounds, in a pre-drawn Waterford format that allowed each "am" to play with or against six different "pros" and against three different "ams". Each round had a time limit of 50 minutes, plus one turn for each ball after time was called, play to continue for one more hoop in the case of a tie. This kept the event on schedule, while allowing most games to finish with the winners scoring the full seven points.

"Amateur" players Richard Boger of the Highlands Croquet Club and Gil Flowers of the Wildcat Cliffs Croquet Club finished the day undefeated, Boger winning the top prize on net points. Sherif Abdelwahab led the "pros" with five wins in six rounds, followed by Ben Rothman with four wins.

After handing out the prizes for the Pro-Am, Albert then explained the Crazy Croquet course while Abdelwahab demonstrated each "hole" with his usual flair for showmanship. For a \$25 donation, contestants puzzled their way through nine challenges including the hill of sand, the speed bump, the cage, the water hazard, Alice in Wonderland, and the Bastille. Trillium member Marilyn Price claimed top honors by carding a remarkable 22. (One of the "pros" claimed to have scored 20, but this was never confirmed.)

Weih's painting received two identical winning bids, so she offered to create a second one, an offer gratefully received by the bidders as well as the event organizers.

Raising money for Team USA was of course a major goal of the event. Funding at this level helps insure that we are able to send our strongest possible teams to compete for world championships. But an equally important goal was to further connections between the USA's top GC players and the USCA's largest concentration of GC players and clubs. That this goal also succeeded is shown by the plans already underway for a group of local players to travel to London next May to cheer on the team. You can't put a price on this kind of support.

--Jeff Soo

The Results:

"Pros"

- 1 Sherif Abdelwahab
- 2 Ben Rothman
- 3 Ahab Dincer
- 4 Mohammad Kamal
- 5 Damon Bidencepe
- 6 Jeff Soo
- 7 Matthew Griffith
- 8 Cheryl Bromley

"Ams"

- 1 Richard Boger
- 2 Gil Flowers
- 3 Susan Cunningham
- 4 Karen Connery-Albert
- 5 George Wiemer
- 6 John Walker
- 7 Pat Cunningham
- 8 Kenneth Finn
- 9 Karen Weih's
- 10 Diane Walker
- 11 non-member
- 12 Chris Weih's
- 13 Jochen Lucke
- 14 Bill Taber
- 15 non-member
- 16 Russell Holliday