

**THE TIGER WICKET: The New York Croquet Club Championship**  
**Central Park, New York**  
**July 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, our beloved Club Championship ran its usual unusual course, meaning if you have ever played in one of these tournaments, you are familiar with the many twists, turns, obstacles, and UPSETS that dot the path to the finish line. In fact, participants in the Club Championship have never seen a more unexpected outcome in the final match since Rebeca Bergofsky defeated George Blake in the inaugural NYCC Club Championship of 2007.

Within two weeks of announcing the event, the tournament director rounded up 18 players and scheduled 42 matches in a modified triple elimination ladder. Every year this tournament has been designed like NCAA Championship events with the highest seeded player playing the lowest seeded player. While this format may receive criticism from novice players, it offers many opportunities to learn and gain real tournament experience, for just \$10 per person. Part of the entry fees for this tournament was reserved for USCA sanctioning (semifinals, and finals only), while the rest went to making kick-ass trophies with custom art designed by Chris Kaas, for the Plate Winner and Club Champion. The Plate Event is created from all first and second round losers from the Winner's bracket and is just as complex. Both brackets additionally have their own loser's bracket where a loser can get recycled and climb back up to the final match.



This year we had nearly perfect weather. By midday on both Saturday and Sunday it was quite hot in the low 90s, and Saturday afternoon had a surprise thundershower which evaporated pretty soon thereafter. But enough about the weather, let's talk CROQUET.

The first round, bright and early (Saturday, 8:30am), saw many firsts. The bottom 4 seeds were comprised of new member Ezra Roth, Marlene Benninger and two clinic members: Janet Nelson and Klaud Lucas. It was estimated that between these greenhorns maybe only 1 or 2 American six wicket games had ever been played. And vying for the chance to play Chris Patmore (-3) and Stuart Lawrence (-2), they were in for a real treat!

On the adjacent court, David Isaacs (3) and Tim Rapuano (-1) had the pleasure of company with Wendy Ward (11) and Martine Fournage (11). At first the ladies appeared quite bewildered as they thought David and Tim were in a match and they were playing each other. But that is simply not the format of this tournament! While initially apprehensive, Martine Fournage bucks up and delivers a devastating 13 to 11 end-game strategy to the longtime croquet instructor, Tim Rapuano, banishing him to the plate. In the simultaneous double-banking match, David witnesses these events, and ensures a victory of 16 to 7 over Wendy Ward.

Following this trend, other upsets ensued. In the second round Billy "The Butcher" Chen (9) cut down the ever improving Jeanne Branthover (7) sending her to the Plate Event. After being cleaved 20 to 4, by Chris Patmore (-3), Bill sought revenge in the loser's bracket delivering Gene Nathanson (3.5) six feet under and Ralph Charles (4) to an early retirement.

In the Plate ladder, Jeanne reigned supreme, until the club's webmaster Keith Nichols (11), bumped her down to the loser bracket. But stalwart Jeanne kept it together and enjoyed a second life, eventually reclaiming her position for the Plate Final by sacking Keith "You're no 11!" Nichols. Due to a scheduling mishap, Jeanne played four games on the super sunny Sunday, which should have definitely earned her the trophy, if it was not for just one more contender: Tim "the Director" Rapuano. Given Tim's propensity for going six-ball dead in this tournament, he played an uncharacteristically slow and meticulous break to clench the plate trophy over Jeanne, 15 to 5.

Sunday morning's Championship playoff ladder resumed at 9am with all undefeated players. There was Chris Patmore (-3), Ralph Charles (4), Stuart Lawrence (-2), and David Isaacs (3) sitting on the bench rubbing a magic lamp! Stuart, having dispatched all previous opponents by 26 to something, handily handed Ralph over to the loser's bracket in a similar manner. Meanwhile, out pops the Genie and in a surprise victory over Chris, 14 to 12, David advances to the semifinals. Down in the loser's bracket, Chris climbs back up and once again, carving up the Butcher, with no chance of reprisal. Shortly thereafter, David joins Chris in the loser's bracket by a substantial defeat from Stuart, 26 to 11. But... out pops the Genie (!) and once again, David eliminates Chris, 20 to 11 in their 2<sup>nd</sup> match of the day.

Stuart has won this tournament more than anyone else. In fact, he is the only person to have won it more than once. And with his deft maneuvering with David in the quarterfinal, he was seen celebrating an early victory; with what must have been some Martinelli's apple juice (as the consumption of alcoholic beverages is expressly forbidden in Central Park, beyond the restaurants). With wins in 2012, 2014 and 2015, and the only player to peg out both balls in any match this weekend (let alone, every match!), a "ThreePEAT" victory for Stuart, was nearly guaranteed. But... out pops the Genie (!!)

who grants David his third and final wish. A Genie in a magic lamp is the only explanation for someone, who has expressed no desire to play at the championship level, to succeed where nobody else has... or is he just that good? Time will tell but until then please join me in congratulating David Isaacs, the 2016 New York Croquet Club Champion, who triumphed over Stuart Lawrence, 19-11.



So the Genie goes back in the lamp and the lamp goes back to Ben Rothman, but in its place, David is awarded a 53oz beer glass with custom art by Chris Kaas. He also received a round of applause, many photo opportunities and a thumbs-up approval by the tournament director. Tim for his hard work, dedication for this event, and not losing any more games, received the Plate Winner trophy which is actually a 51oz cocktail pitcher, which could probably hold beer as well.

Immediately following the event an email was submitted to the USCA Handicap Committee Chairman with a request for new handicaps for some of these ringers! Hopefully all the recommendations will be considered to avoid any potential upsets next year!

Big thanks go out to Peter Timmins, Jim Collins, Martine Fournage, Ralph Charles, David Isaacs, Chris Patmore and everyone else that helped with setting up, and making this event run as smoothly as possible. You know who you are!

Tim Rapuano, Tournament Director

**RESULTS:**

- 1 David Isaacs – 2016 Club Champion
- 2 Stuart Lawrence - Runner-Up
- 3 Chris Patmore

- 10 Jeanne Branthover - Plate Runner-Up
- 11 Keith Nichols
- 12 John Seidler

Full completed brackets and all the scores  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/>

