

USCA Northeast Regional Championship
Lenox Croquet Club, Lenox, Massachusetts
August 12-14, 2016

"To the peg!" was the motto for this year's Northeast Regional Championship, held over three days at the Lenox Croquet Club in Lenox, Massachusetts. With two full-sized courts and a smallish field of players, the tournament director saw an opportunity to test would-be Regional Champions with fewer, but longer games. Sixteen players in two flights competed in a singles-only tournament that culminated with untimed final matches, a relatively rare phenomenon in the clock-obsessed world of American rules croquet.

The ten players in the Championship Flight, with handicaps ranging from -2 to 1.5, played four 90-minute block games, after which eight advanced to playoffs seeded by block standings. Quarterfinals were timed at two hours, which was long enough for three of the four matches to be won by a score of 26. The semifinal and final rounds were played without game clocks, which, incidentally, means no 45-second shot clock either.

Sunday morning opened with Randy Cardo defeating Lenox Croquet Club president David Ekstrom 26-22 in a interactive semifinal. Randy, whose more aggressive style contrasted with David's focus on picking up points with short two-ball breaks using his partner ball, overcame a series of costly early errors to peg out after more than two and a half hours of play. In the other semifinal, pitting Stuart Lawrence against National Croquet Center pro Rick Landry, Rick made several impressive long roquets on line balls and aggressively attacked to give himself a great chance to knock out the top seed. Both players alternated between steady break play and random misses out of nowhere. After making rover with Red, Stuart left his severely dead Yellow with a 10-foot shot at 4-back, then promptly blobbed 1-back while attempting to get clean, with Blue just a few feet away. Rick missed with Black, Stuart drained the hoop shot, and then made a 14-yard roquet on Blue to pick up the final break.

The final was much tidier and quicker than either of the semis. Randy went to corner IV and about 6 feet north of IV, respectively, with Blue and Black, while Stuart set up a line rush for Red in corner I. Blue passed, and Red, attempting to rush to the attack, rushed Yellow out of bounds about four yards east of I, ending up on court about five feet from I in the direction of hoop #4. Black shot at Red and missed into I, giving Yellow an easy attack to set Red up with a three-ball break. Blue then missed Yellow, ending a yard south of corner II. After making #2 with Red, Stuart rushed Yellow back to position and peeled it through #2 with a pass roll going to Blue on the boundary. With a few more shots, Stuart was on a four-ball break, which he took to the peg, setting up a three-ball break for Yellow and leaving Black a 96-foot open shot at a ball near #3. Randy took on the long shot but unluckily hit the hoop, staying on court a few feet in from corner III. Stuart took what was now a four-ball break to the peg for the championship.

First Flight, with just six players, comprised what in a larger tournament would have been separate first and second flights. Handicaps ranged from Lloyd Hadden at 4.5 and Martie Ekstrom at 6 to Linda and Bob Taber at 12. As it turns out, there was no reason to worry that this would mean a lopsided outcome in favor of the lower handicapped players. If proof were needed that USCA handicaps may not be the best predictor of a rising novice's chances, Bob Taber is that proof. Bob only won two of his five block games, but in the playoffs, he eliminated Lloyd 21-14 in the semifinal and Martie 26-22 in the untimed final. Bob still has some distance to go before he will have mastered American rules tactics, but his play is steady, he can seemingly hit anything, and he is an eager learner. Hopefully Bob's USCA Regional victory will motivate Linda and Bob to take part in challenging competitions around New England and beyond.

Off the courts, the highlight of the Regional was a delicious tournament dinner at the Lenox Club, the 152-year-old dining and social club on whose grounds the Lenox Croquet Club has its lawns and pavilion. Breakfasts, lunches, post-play toast and tally gatherings, and boardkeeping were provided by the fantastic team of Joan and Bob Comeau, Priscilla Lamond, and Martie Ekstrom, with David Ekstrom coordinating the event as Tournament Manager.

Final standings:

Championship Flight Singles

1. Stuart Lawrence
2. Randy Cardo
3. Rick Landry
3. David Ekstrom
5. James Erwin
5. Michael Gibbons
5. Christopher Loat
5. James Turner
9. David McCoy
9. John Schott

First Flight Singles

1. Robert Taber
2. Martie Ekstrom
3. Lloyd Hadden
3. James McLaughlin
5. Thomas Gilbert
5. Linda Taber



Stuart Lawrence and Randy Cardo



Robert Taber and Martie Ekstrom



Group Photo

Complete results:

Championship Flight Singles

Block games (90 minute time limit)

"Harlem" Block

Mike Gibbons (-1) beat Chris Loat (1.5) 22-11
Mike Gibbons beat Jim Erwin (0) 13-12
Stuart Lawrence (-2) beat John Schott (1.5) 26-9
Jim Erwin beat Chris Loat 19-12
Mike Gibbons beat John Schott 19-4
Stuart Lawrence beat Chris Loat 26-9
Jim Erwin beat John Schott 22-10
Stuart Lawrence beat Jim Erwin 26-2
Stuart Lawrence beat Mike Gibbons 26-11
Chris Loat beat John Schott 16-14

"New Haven" Block

Randy Cardo (-1.5) beat Jim Turner (1.5) 18-17
Rick Landry (1.0) beat David McCoy (-0.5) 22-11
Randy Cardo beat David McCoy 21-18
David Ekstrom (-1.5) beat Jim Turner 22-18
David Ekstrom beat David McCoy 19-12
Randy Cardo beat Rick Landry 20-16
David McCoy beat Jim Turner 17-21
Jim Turner beat Rick Landry 26-19
Randy Cardo beat David Ekstrom 17-16
Rick Landry beat David Ekstrom 26-13

Quarterfinals (2 hour time limit)

Randy Cardo beat Chris Loat 26-22
Rick Landry beat Jim Erwin 26-21
Stuart Lawrence beat Jim Turner 26-6
David Ekstrom beat Mike Gibbons 20-18

Semifinals (No time limit)

Randy Cardo beat David Ekstrom 26-22
Stuart Lawrence beat Rick Landry 26-21

Final (No time limit)

Stuart Lawrence beat Randy Cardo 26-2

First Flight Singles

Block games (80 minute time limit)

"Housatonic" Block

Martie Ekstrom (6) beat Bob Taber (12) 14-11
Linda Taber (12) beat Jim McLaughlin (8) 15-13
Lloyd Hadden (4.5) beat Tom Gilbert (11) 14-11
Lloyd Hadden beat Bob Taber 13-11
Martie Ekstrom beat Linda Taber 17-8
Jim McLaughlin beat Tom Gilbert 18-13
Lloyd Hadden beat Linda Taber 16-9
Tom Gilbert beat Bob Taber 21-20
Martie Ekstrom beat Jim McLaughlin 17-11
Martie Ekstrom beat Tom Gilbert 26-10
Bob Taber beat Jim McLaughlin 18-15
Linda Taber beat Tom Gilbert 17-16
Martie Ekstrom beat Lloyd Hadden 17-15
Bob Taber beat Linda Taber 21-16
Lloyd Hadden beat Jim McLaughlin 16-12

Playoffs (2 hour time limit)

Jim McLaughlin beat Linda Taber 14-12
Bob Taber beat Tom Gilbert 26-10
Martie Ekstrom beat Jim McLaughlin 20-17
Bob Taber beat Lloyd Hadden 21-14

Final (No time limit)

Bob Taber beat Martie Ekstrom 26-22

A very special THANK YOU to Rita McNamara for volunteering and working the deadness boards.

Stuart Lawrence, TD