

New Zealand is the GC World Team Champion – United States wins Consolation Finals

By Rich Lamm

The 2016 GC World Team Championships were held in Surbiton, England May 15 – 21st.

New Zealand held a 4-2 lead overnight leading into the last day of the finals but saw the match tighten to 5-4 after the morning doubles and two singles. A crowd of well over 100 watched the final four singles. Having lost a single game playoff with Ireland 2-0, the US side marched through the consolation bracket, defeating Wales 5-1 and then South Africa 5-1 before winning the Consolation championship 8-1 against Sweden.

New Zealand vs. Egypt (Championship Finals):

Ahmed Nasr kept Egyptian hopes alive by defeating Duncan Dixon 7-4, 7-6 but, in the bottom singles, where Egyptian hopes were probably highest, it was the turn of Jenny Clarke and Phillip Drew to rise to the occasion.

Jenny defeated Mohamed Nasr 7-4, 5-7, 7-3 and Phillip beat Hamy Erian 7-6, 7-6. This gave New Zealand an unassailable 7-5 lead and the match between Chris Clarke and Mohamed Karem was abandoned at 6-6 in the second game, the first having gone to Chris 7-5.

The New Zealand team was presented with their winner's medals by Amir Ramsis, the WCF President and the Openshaw Shield by David Openshaw himself. Quiller Barrett, the President of the Croquet Association, paid a warm tribute to the great efforts made by the teams of volunteers at the host clubs of Surbiton, Bath, Camerton & Peasdown and Guildford & Godalming.

United States vs. Sweden (Consolation Finals Tier I):

The Consolation finals were played over two days in a nine match format. All matches were best of three games. The US won five of six matches on the first day, sealing the win with dominating performances by Captain Ben Rothman, a 7-3, 7-1 winner over Lewis Palmer; Danny Huneycutt cruising past Anton Varnas 7-0, 7-3, David Bent besting Simon Carlsson 7-5, 7-3 and Sherif Abdelwahab slipping by Joi Elebo ("Joey the Elbow") 7-6, 7-6. Sherif's win over Joi was hard fought and well deserved. Joi was the bright spot on the Swedish team throughout the event, demonstrating great promise for such a young player.

South Africa vs. Wales (Relegation Finals):

This match generated comparable interest to the Championships finals, as the loser dropped to Tier II while the winner of Tier II (Australia) earned promotion to Tier I. By the end of the test's second day, with Ian Burrige (Wales) and William Louw (South Africa) standing at one game apiece, 7-6, 6-7 in the final match and the overall test being tied, the hopes and dreams of both teams hung on this last game. In the end, William won a brutally contested hoop thirteen, saving South Africa from relegation to the lower tier.

Standard of Play & Spirit of Competition:

This extraordinary event brought the very best players from around the world to Surbiton Croquet Club in the United Kingdom for eight days of hard fought and highly entertaining competition. Without question, the level of play was described by all as vastly superior to the previous event held in South Africa.

The US team played extremely well and but for an unusual tie-break single game playoff against Ireland for the opportunity to play for the Championship title, the Americans more than held their own and more often than not, dominated their opponents. Ben Rothman, playing at US #1, went 4-2 in matches against the very best players in the world, losing only to World #1 Reg Bamford and World #3 Ahmed Nasr. He took both of them to three games, demonstrating that no one in the world is safe when playing Ben Rothman and that we truly have a world champion calibre player right in our own backyard.

Danny Huneycutt, playing at US #2 in his first World GC event, showed he is very much at ease on this stage, winning five of his seven matches and getting stronger with each outing. David Bent reminded us of why he is so integral to this team, going 4-2 at US #3 and taking a game off of Mohammad Nasr, World #7 in his match with Egypt.

Sherif Abdelwahab finished a strong 3-3 in match play, providing the most spectacular shots of the day each and every day and playing at US #1 Doubles with Ben Rothman, their team finishing 6-1 on the week. Alternate Rich Lamm (the author of this article) boasts the only undefeated record of the entire world championship field, winning both matches in singles and doubles (with Danny Huneycutt) by 2-0 game scores.

It cannot go unsaid that none of this would have been possible without the efforts of Michael Albert and all of the North Carolina mountain folk, who so generously raised the funds to send the entire team to England for this event. Many of these enthusiasts, including Michael and Karen Connery-Albert, Dick Boger, Mary Ann Hardman, Hal Denton, Ken and Barbara Finn, and Bill Taber to name a few, travelled to England to watch the team and support them daily from the side lines. No other traveling country was so well represented by their loyal supporters.

In Summary:

While it's easy to say that golf croquet is the future of the game when you've just witnessed an event such as this, it's hard to deny the overall sense of excitement generated throughout the week and the overwhelming camaraderie shared among these exceptional players and spectators. The US team is anxious to return home now to prepare for the next world battle and to share all that they've experienced and learned over these past eight days with each other and all of our GC partners.



Ben Rothman and Joi Elebo (aka, "Joey the Elbow")