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Nottingham List

by Chris Clarke [and Dr. Timothy King, Tournament Manager]

Inaugural WCF GC World Team Championship – Preview

I thought that I would try and write a preview for this event since there has been so little build-up so far. The event will start on Monday and is being played in Johannesburg. Whilst this is the first GC world teams, I believe that this event will, in time, become as prestigious as the MacRobertson Shield.

There are 8 teams competing in 2 blocks of 4, with the top 2 teams from each block progressing to the semi-finals. The first 3 days will be the block matches where the teams will play three 1-day Tests against the other teams in their block. There will be a doubles and two singles followed by four singles (all best of 6, 13point), so each Test will be best of 7 matches. Teams have four players for each Test, but are allowed to switch the composition of the 4 players between Tests.

The semi-finals and final will be played over 2 days each and will have longer formats (I think it is 3 doubles and 10 singles, but may be wrong about this).

So, let's have a look at the composition of the 8 teams and see if we can find the likely semi-finalists

Block A

Egypt

Ahmed El Mahdi (Captain). One of the few Egyptian players to use a longer headed mallet, Mahdi was regarded as one of the world's best a few years ago. His results over the past 18 months haven't been as good, but he is an experienced competitor.

Ahmed Nasr. Two time world champion, Ahmed, whilst only being ranked world number 6, is the best player in the world for my money. His positional play is strong and his clearances at short and long range are extremely accurate and powerful. His weaknesses are gentle hoop attempts and jump shots.

Mohammed Nasr. A previous world champion, Mohammed is the most powerful player in the world. He is extremely aggressive and can sometimes appear too casual in his approach, seeming to be happy to get 3 or 4 yards in front a hoop when most of us would be trying for much closer. If he plays at his best, he is virtually impossible to beat, but he regularly plays at a lower level, allowing more cautious players a chance to beat him.

Anwar Abdel Aziz. Anwar has gone from outside the world's top 100 to number 37 over the past 2 months. His results in the Egyptian Open were a bit disappointing, but he is clearly rated very highly having been selected above other very strong Egyptians

Australia

Kevin Beard (Captain). Kevin is an experienced player at both codes of the game. He has good touch and plays a balanced game with less power than some other players.

John van der Touw beat Yasser Esmat in his block at the last Worlds, but was unable to match this result in his other games, eventually finishing 6th out of 8. He is ranked world number 54.

Terry Ericson is the world number 72 and narrowly failed to qualify from his block in the last world champs, finishing 5th.

Greg Bury or “Cannonball” to his friends. Greg uses one of the shortest mallet heads in the world and hits the ball very hard. He is the author of a book about golf croquet and is ranked number 82. He qualified 2= from his block in the last worlds before losing in 3 to Mohammed Nasr.

John Levick is a highly consistent performer ranked world number 78. He qualified 2= in his block at the last worlds before losing to Sherif Nafee, one of the favourites for the event.

New Zealand

Duncan Dixon (Captain). Multiple times (and current) NZ GC Open Champion, Duncan is a tough match player. He isn't the best of shots, but has good positional play and sound decision making. He took Reg Bamford to the third in the last Worlds knockout.

Hamish McIntosh is still very much in the early stages of his croquet career. He was semi-finalist in the last Worlds, has won the NZ AC Open Doubles in both the last two seasons and is a tough match player.

Mike Crashley is making his international team debut. Mike made it onto the NZ team by winning all his matches in the GC invitations last season. He is ranked world number 27

Phillip Drew is still pretty young but has been around for several years. Phillip is a powerful striker of the ball, good tactically but can become a bit nervy under pressure. This event will be an excellent opportunity for him to show his true ability.

Sweden

Simon Carlsson (Captain). Simon burst onto the World scene when he beat Stephen Mulliner in the final of the 2010 European GC Champs. He has yet to repeat such heroics and failed to qualify from his block in the last Worlds.

Anders Moldin is a player I haven't seen before. He is ranked world number 347

Jonatan Andersson is an extremely strong match player. What he lacks in power, he makes up for in consistency and accuracy. He is ranked world number 30 and will be a good test for any opponent.

Joi Elebo is a player I haven't watched with a world ranking of number 106.

Block B

England

Stephen Mulliner (Captain). Stephen is a very strong and experienced player. He is current British Champion, having beaten Reg Bamford in the final and only lost to Ahmed Nasr in the last worlds, having played pretty well. Stephen will be hoping that he can avoid another disaster as Captain of his country.

Jacob Carr is ranked world number 36 and has an excellent record in tournaments held in Yorkshire. He failed to qualify from his block in the only world champs he has competed in.

James Goodbun is ranked world number 45 and almost beat Mark McInerney in the first round of the knockout of the last world champs, losing from 6-4 up in the decider. James has never played in the British Open, but has played abroad - his best result since the previous worlds was winning 9 out of 21 in the Palm Beach Invitational.

Will Gee. After a disappointing U-21 World Champs where he lost to Pauline Salib, Will had a good remainder to the 2011 season, winning the Ascot Cup. University studies have meant that he has played very little croquet during the past year. Will is ranked world number 7 making him the third highest ranked player in the event.

South Africa

Reg Bamford (Captain). Runner-up in the 2008 World Champs, Reg was unlucky to be the victim of a bad refereeing decision in the last worlds. Reg loves wearing his Springbok blazer and I expect him to lead his team from the front, winning all his matches.

William Louw is ranked world number 50. Whilst still being fairly young, William has been playing for over 20 years.

Victor Dladla is one of the most volatile players in the world. He can string together a series of fine powerful strokes before missing something fairly easy. He is ranked world number 126.

Judith Hanekom, Mike Corcoran and Neil McHardy are players that I don't know very well. [Judith Hanekom is the only woman competing, having only started playing competitive GC about one year ago (although she has played AC for many years).]

USA

Sherif Abdelwahab (Captain). Sherif is an experienced GC player. He was a member of the Rest of the World team that beat Egypt at Roehampton a few years ago. He can be quite a volatile player, but will give anyone a good game if on top form.

David Bent is a player who relies on consistency and accuracy rather than raw power. David is ranked world number 48

Mohammed Kamal is another experienced competitor. He sometimes lacks the consistency that he would desire, but can play with both touch and power. World ranked number 87.

Ben Rothman is better known as an AC player, but is a tough opponent in both forms of the game. Ben narrowly failed to qualify for the knockout of the previous worlds, losing 7-6 to Pierre Beaudry in a play-off.

Ireland

Evan Newell (Captain) is bringing six players to this event and it will be interesting to see what player rotations the Irish use. Evan is a very experienced GC player, being a regular participant in the Egyptain Open where he won the Consolation event this year. Evan seems to win and lose more games by large margins than most players, so you can never be sure how he will do.

Simon Williams is a vastly experienced and skilled croquet player. Simon has played all over the world and usually performs to a good standard. Simon does not have a world ranking.

Ed Cunningham won the Presidents Cup as a youngster and has since struggled to recover that level of form. Ed is an aggressive GC player and could easily take a big scalp if he finds top form. He is ranked number 42.

Fred Rogerson is someone who I haven't seen playing GC.

Jack Clingan is one of Irelands new crop of young players. Jack is ranked world number 276.

Patsy Fitzgerald is a player who has improved steadily over the past few years. He has numerous big wins and is ranked number 70

So, who are my semi-finalists?

Block A

1st Egypt
2nd NZ

Reasoning. Egypt has too much power and experience with Nasr x2 and Mahdi. New Zealand have a good balanced team which will have too much flair for the Aussies who I think will just beat Sweden for third.

Block B

1st England
2nd USA

Reasoning. I'm told that England have 4 players better than me, so it should just be a matter of who gets second. I think South Africa will win a lot of games, but may lose all 3 matches 4-3 and I've plumped for USA rather than Ireland because I think they will be more consistent.

Semi-Finals

Egypt bt USA
England bt NZ

Final

England bt Egypt

Who do you think will be in the semis?

Best wishes to all competitors for an enjoyable event.

[We will be looking to keep everyone informed through various means over the Internet, including <http://www.gcwtcroquet.co.za/>.]

[The South African organizer's have done fantastic work and I have turned up with little to do other than make sure the right matches are played by the right people at the right time.]