

**2012 USCA Golf Croquet National Championships**  
Mission Hills Croquet Club in Rancho Mirage, California  
by Ben Rothman

During the week of December 11-15 Mission Hills Croquet Club played host to the USCA National Championships for the second time in 2012 and the fifth time in the last two years. The Golf Croquet Nationals arrived on the heels of the U.S. Open and just two weeks after the inaugural World Golf Croquet Team Championships where the U.S. team placed fourth. Two of the four team members made it to the Nationals that being the successful doubles team of Ben Rothman and Sherif Abdelwahab. The 2011 singles and doubles champion Rich Lamm was also in attendance having switched partners from the absent Danny Huneycutt to the accomplished Jeff Soo. While Rich and Jeff have been known to partner before, the true blast from the past was the Canadian comrades Brian Cumming and Leo McBride. In the first flight, former champion Welles Farago and the team of Cameron and Lou Ann Evans were back in the mix along with the 2011 finalist Nick Gray. The festivities began with a fun reception at the Country Club allowing everyone to size each other up before the competition started.



*Mission Hills Country Club*

The 2012 contest minimized doubles play and featured a best-of-three knockout for singles and doubles in both flights. To keep from having delays, games were scheduled in 90 minute time slots with best-of-three matches slated for an entire morning or afternoon. With the sun setting as early as 4pm, time was at a premium and tournament director Ben Rothman was

not taking any chances. All of the singles and first flight doubles began with block play while the championship doubles competition was a best-of-three ladder from the get go.

The first day of championship doubles followed seed as the crafty *canucks* defeated the Mission Hills Croquet Club president Mary Rodeberg and the traveling treasurer Steve Mossbrook 7-3 and 7-5. The fourth seeded Jim Butts and Leo Nikora had a bit more of a struggle against Ron Hendry and Mike Orgill. Despite Ron's impressive hoop shots Jim and Leo finessed their way onto the semifinals in the third game 7-4. To avoid the lull associated with a first round bye, the top two doubles teams played a match for the coveted top seed. The winners would rightfully claim the number one spot in the ladder while the losers would face Brian and Leo. Continuing their success from the World Championship, Ben and Sherif won in two close games 7-6 and 7-5 to avoid the Canadians, for one round.

The first flight doubles format included a full round robin before the ladder was to begin. Nick Gray and mallet maker Bob Morford were undefeated in the round robin while Welles Farago and Pat Dugan took the second seed with only one loss. In the semifinals, Gray and Morford kept a healthy lead against Hope Harmon and Lewis Barry and managed to preserve the equally perfect records of both teams 7-3, 7-4. The mother/son team of Cameron and Lou Ann Evans turned up the heat to win game one 7-5, but Welles and Pat took advantage of the format with two decisive wins 7-3, 7-1 to move into the final against the top squad.

In singles action Nick Gray rolled through block play with only one loss at the hands of Pat Dugan 7-6. Nick was otherwise undefeated as he claimed the top seed. Pat Dugan earned the second seed with consistent shooting and a complete failure to realize when he was too far away to hit his target reliably, which he exhibited just before he hit some of his more spectacular shots. The first flight had a four way tie for third place at 3-3 with Cameron Evans taking the honors on net points. When the knockout started, that's when Cameron turned on the charm. Working his way around the hoop like a pool shark, Cameron dismantled Welles Farago 7-4, 7-5 to earn a match with Mr. Dugan. Bob Morford demoralized Hope Harmon so much with his game one victory that she tried to go home. When she was reminded that the playoffs were match play she rallied and took the match well past sunset, winning 5-7, 7-5, 7-6. Hope's resilience showed in the semi-final; after losing 7-2, Hope battled back and took game two 7-6. Nick was unperturbed as he repeated his game one success and moved into his second consecutive final. After beating Cameron 7-6 in the block, Pat knew he was in for a fight. Cameron got his revenge 7-2 in game one but lost his grip and game two 7-3. The rubber match was nearly as close as their block game with Cameron out-positioning Pat to win 7-5.

The championship flight had eight rounds of singles before the ladder was to begin. Ben Rothman started out strong, allowing only one point in his first three games. Rich Lamm seemed on form, but lost to the fearless hoop-shooter Ron Hendry. Rich was not alone as Sherif Abdelwahab also succumbed to the wily veteran. Rothman showed he was human as Leo Nikora took him down 7-4. Steve Mossbrook took a few scalps in a bid for the playoffs beating Jeff Soo and Brian Cumming. When the block came to an end a 4-4 record did not guarantee a playoff berth. Rothman took top seed while his partner, Abdelwahab, took second. There was a three way tie for third between Soo, Hendry, and Nikora and a four way tie for the remaining three ladder spots. After all the tie-breakers the 2011 champion was disqualified for his terribly offensive angry-birds-themed beanie and lack of net points.

In the ladder, Rothman and Nikora moved easily into opposing sides of the semifinals. Sherif took out Leo McBride while Brian upset the number-three-seeded Jeff Soo. Sherif used his thunderous power to take out both Canadians, with a great closing act in both games against Brian. Sherif and Brian were tied 3-3 in each game when Sherif took full control to win 7-3, 7-4. Ben seemed to lose his swing and his luck at exactly the wrong time. Game one against Leo Nikora exposed a few of Rothman's worst strokes including a game-ending 20 yard unlucky

roquet to promote Leo's ball into scoring position at the playoff hoop. Nikora followed Ben down the rabbit hole and lost a bit of accuracy in game two while Rothman saved the best for last. Tied at 3-3, Rothman made four consecutive hoops to defeat Nikora 6-7, 7-5, 7-3.

The doubles semifinals pitted the tried and tested teams against each other with Lamm and Soo versus McBride and Cumming. This was the last chance for 2011 champion Rich Lamm, but the Canadians were not having it. Game one went to the limit, but the Canadians delivered in the clutch 7-6 and let the momentum carry them through. Lamm and Soo saw the writing on the wall and lost a bit of confidence as Leo and Brian soldiered on 7-4 into the finals. On the other side of the ladder Rothman and Abdelwahab were facing the blocking prowess of Nikora and Butts. In game one the power game succeeded 7-3, but when the Mission Hills residents found the speed of the lawn, all the balls stopped on a dime and they took game two 7-4. In game three, Ben and Sherif steadied the ship with reliable clearances and confident hoop shots to move onto the finals 7-4.



*San Jacinto Mountain*

The finals day greeted the players with clear views of snowcapped mountains encouraging players to aim high. First flight doubles continued the streak of Bob Morford and Nick Gray who controlled the match from start to finish. Pat and Welles could not take the lead despite strong shooting and lost 7-3, 7-3. Bob and Nick were undefeated throughout the entire tournament. Championship doubles was a tight battle until the jump shots started. Rothman scored hoops 10 and 11 with smooth jump shots to take game one and made a tough jump through hoop five all the way down to hoop six for control of game two. The US team

representatives added Canada to their growing list of conquered countries 7-4, 7-3.



*Pat Dugan, Bob Morford, Nick Gray, and Wells Farago*



*Leo McBride, and Brian Cumming*



*Ben Rothman, and Sharif Abdelwahab*

The friendly summer rivalry between Nick Gray and Cameron Evans came to fruition in the first flight singles final. Nick had only lost two games going in, while Cameron had to battle from a mediocre record in the blocks. Nearly the entire match alternated points as neither player

could build a consistent two-hoop play. After Cameron took game one 7-5, Nick battled to win game two 7-6. Spectators got their full value with a game three, hoop 13 playoff for the title. The clutch play of the day went to Cameron Evans for his first USCA national singles title!



*Cameron Evans*

In the main event, the newly crowned doubles champions put their teamwork aside and started to punish each other. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your opponent can help, but Sherif let it get to him. The worry about consequences took Sherif away from his clutch clearances and brought on a few uncharacteristic misses while Ben kept his aim high with many jump shots. Sherif made way for partner and became the runner-up for a record sixth time. Ben Rothman scored the victory 7-4, 7-3 and became holder of five national championships. These are Rothman's 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> national titles and the doubles title completed his quest to win all six of the six wicket national championships.



*Ben Rothman*

USCA Golf Croquet National Championship  
December 11-15, 2012  
Rancho Mirage, CA

Championship Flight Singles

1. Ben Rothman
2. Sherif Abdelwahab
3. Brian Cumming
3. Leo Nikora
5. Jeff Soo
5. Leo McBride
5. Ron Hendry
5. Steve Mossbrook
9. Rich Lamm
10. Jim Butts
11. Mike Orgill
12. Mary Rodeberg

First Flight Singles

1. Cameron Evans
2. Nick Gray
3. Pat Dugan
3. Hope Harmon
5. Bob Morford
5. Welles Farago
7. Lewis Barry

Championship Doubles

1. Ben Rothman & Sherif Abdelwahab
2. Brian Cumming & Leo McBride
3. Rich Lamm & Jeff Soo
3. Leo Nikora & Jim Butts
5. Ron Hendry & Mike Orgill
5. Steve Mossbrook & Mary Rodeberg

First Flight Doubles

1. Nick Gray & Bob Morford
2. Pat Dugan & Welles Farago
3. Cameron Evans & LouAnn Evans
4. Hope Harmon & Lewis Barry

Championship Singles Winner



Mary Rodeberg-TM, Ben Rothman

Championship Doubles Winners



Sherif Abdelwahab, Mary Rodeberg-TD, Ben Rothman

First Flight Singles Winner



Mary Rodeberg-TM, Cameron Evans, Ben Rothman-TD

First Flight Doubles Winners



Mary Rodeberg-TM, Nick Gray, Bob Morford,  
Ben. Rothman-TD