

2014 USCA CLUB TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS

When I was a teenager, I decided to invite 15-20 of my only friends over for a little party. And why not? With my parents away for the weekend and an empty apartment just going to waste, what could possibly go wrong? That is, until, after a quick beer run, I found over almost 200 strangers now dancing upon the furniture and eating everything within the fridge. Well, the expression I had then was probably identical to the one when, last year, 130 croquet players managed to amazingly crash the USCA Club Team Championships. I'm still not certain how or why either incident occurred, but trying to fit an uncountable number of nomads into a small NYC apartment was undoubtedly easier than squeezing 65 doubles duos onto a mere 12 lawns.

This year, in comparison, was a breath of fresh air. With a manageable 90 participants, those in attendance were blessed with three matches per day and the schedule was almost casual. No silverware was heisted and the walls remained graffiti free. The bar was opened almost throughout the entire event, but unlike last year, and in a confusing twist, the players remained only a bit south of sober. I believe, and am pretty certain, that this strange change of behavior stemmed from the fact that St. Patrick's Day, a landmark that always seems to fall within the Club Teams, would not occur until after the croquet festivities had come to a conclusion. In the past, St. Patty's Day always seemed to transform 'Croquet Week' into Mardi Gras; player's late for a match were often found napping in the lounge, one ear on the bar and the other still a fair target for Ted Prentis. Sure, in keeping with tradition, everyone was encouraged to wear green on Saturday, but without the green beer and the presence of Sandy Walsh, things weren't nearly as insane. Doug Moore and John Young III tried to incite the crowd with kilts, but even with that effort Mr. Prentis was forced to actually sit courtside. And yes, I digress.

In regard to the actual tournament, instead of the six Flights needed 12 months earlier, five Flights now battled it out for the coveted Lyon's Trophy. Matches were timed at one hour and fifteen minutes and the general format broke down as such: Championship Flight - Seven teams played in a double round-robin, the top four making the single-elimination Playoffs. First Flight - Eight teams played in a modified double round-robin with, once again, the top four propelled into the Playoffs. Second, Third and Fourth Flights - Ten teams played a complete block. The top six teams in each fell into a double-elimination ladder, including two byes, with the remaining four teams left with only one life in the draw. And it all flowed quite well – certainly better than the explanation of it.

Of course, while the Lyon's Trophy itself does offer large, medium and small sized sub-divisions, it goes without saying that the Club which sends the most teams stands the best chance of taking the overall Title. This year, once again, The National Croquet Club, defending Champion and playing upon their home lawns, flooded the field with 11 pairs. Both Bombay and West River throw seven teams into the mix while the New York Croquet Club tossed in an inspired six. And yes, team allegiance was well displayed throughout the event, but individual achievements within each Flight never really took the back seat, each player and team trying to be at their best. Oddly, few, if any, succeeded.

I would love to tell you about the impressive play exhibited throughout. You know, about triple peels and undefeated records. Instead, try these numbers out for size: 16-12, 10-7, 12-9, 12-11 and 8-7. Guess what? Those were the scores, in order, of the five Finals, the conclusion of five days of play when only the best of the best were left standing. Sure, the tournament started out well, with the team of

Derek Wassink & Dick Brackett going 6-0 for the first two days while pocketing two 26-2 victories. Sadly, in the 250+ games played, those would be the only two matches to reach 26 points and only two of four winning scores to even break the 20 barrier. Derek & Dick, the landslide favorites in the Championship Flight, would go on to lose five of their next seven matches and become, well, scenery. The most popular score, in almost all Flights, was 11-10. Occasionally a blow-out would occur, such as the Ted Hilles & Jane Osgood's impressive 3-2 slaughter over Penny Ferraro & Franklin Perrell. Not often can you double the opponent's score and still win a squeaker.

And not that the play wasn't spirited! It takes a lot of inner strength, and overtimes, to win an 8-7 decision. With limited points being scored, games were close throughout, upsets were common and in terms of a spectator's perspective, this was an awesome event. Who wants to watch a bunch of players who play perfectly? And who doesn't like to discuss why the scores were low, or why so-and-so didn't win? My belief is that with a full moon, a latent St. Patrick's Day and the distraction of those kilts, nothing other than 'strange' could be expected. Les Kelley and Karen Cooley winning the Second Flight? Come on! Surprises were abundant with every precious wicket...and maybe more rum does mean more wickets.

Like a poorly written movie, the last predictable scene of the Club Teams saw The National Croquet Club capturing the Lyon's Trophy. Even without winning a Flight, the nickel and dime game does go a long way when you have a lot of change in your pocket, points being scored for the first four or five finishers in each Flight. Not to take anything away from the Club's overall effort, for this was well orchestrated, but odds are that restrictions upon 'point-earning' teams may be promoted in the future. We'll see.

Croquet Week, in general, reaches far beyond the Club Teams. Alongside the Clubs you could find the Golf Croquet tournament (reported elsewhere), two schools, silent auctions, Ted Prentis and a slew of food and drink offered from morning through night. It's was all there for the taking. And if I sound as though there was anything unattractive about this event, there wasn't. In fact, it was fantastic! Great sportsmanship, plenty of play, fabulous food, exciting finishes and wonderful sportsmanship...this event proved to be one of the more enjoyable Club Team Championships of all time. And with that goes special thanks to the overworked USCA staff, as well as the great service offered from the NCC catering department.

My doorman, back in the seventies, could not keep his mouth shut. His nickname was, before he stumbled into a questionable accident: Guy who will do anything for something on a sliding scale. For five bucks he would have testified against the mob, and with ten bucks from my mother now in his hand, he lost no sleep in spilling the beans about my blow-out party. (Derek Wassink offered me \$100 to not mention how badly he played this year, and I took it, so please don't let anyone know.) No croquet enthusiast spends significant money to travel to Florida to play one or two matches a day...which was the case a year ago. Those that were there felt cheated, and no one disagreed. And the word spread. Since then a cap has been put into place. In fact, this year's Club Teams may have been the most enjoyable ever, and I encourage everyone to share their experiences and await news about next year's 'Mardi Gras'.

Until another unexpected next year, John C. Osborn (TD)

CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT

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|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Stephen Morgan – Ed O’Laughlin | West River |
| 2. John Young – Doug Moore | NYCC |
| 3. Derek Wassink – Dick Brackett | NCC |
| 4. David McCoy – John Warlick | NCC |
| 5. David Collie – Pat Colt | NCC |
| 6. Perry Mattson – Webster Bull | Woodlawn |
| 7. Dave Theiste – Peder Theiste | Heatherwood |

FIRST FLIGHT

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|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Templeton Peck – Jim Collins | NYCC |
| 2. Dick Scherf – Randy Cardo | NCC |
| 3. John Blamire – Larry McDermott | NCC |
| 4. Bill Trower – David Spivey | NCC |
| 5. Calvert Chaney – Roy Morgan | West River |
| 6. Betty Whitlow – Margo Stinson | PGA |
| 7. Lucille Maresca – Cheryl Harders | Bombay |
| 8. Andree Bothe – Bernie Pattie | Bombay |

SECOND FLIGHT

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|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Les Kelley – Karen Cooley | Bombay |
| 2. Bob Yount – Diane Sadowski | NCC |
| 3. Gerry McCauley – Hal Denton | NCC |
| 4. John Woodside – David Isaacs | NYCC |
| 5. Howard Holdsclaw – Lois Holdsclaw | Tulsa |
| 6. Sara Low – Karen Kaplan | NYCC |
| 7. Randall McAndrews – George Forsyth | Mariner Sands |
| 8. George Fulmer – Ted Cooley | Bombay |
| 9. Lee Hanna – Lynn LeBlanc | Bombay |
| 10. Beth Ann Theiste – Robin Sweet | Heatherwood |

THIRD FLIGHT

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| 1. Charles Alexander – Tim McCormick | Woodlawn |
| 2. Scott Spradling – Suzanne Spradling | Oklahoma City |
| 3. Brian Cooke – Erinn Cooke | West River |
| 4. Ted Hilles – Jane Osgood | NYCC |
| 5. Carla Rueck – Randi Cutlitz | NYCC |
| 6. Penny Ferraro – Franklin Perrell | Westhampton |

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|--------------------------------------|------------|
| 7. Anne Licursi – Rosemary Faulconer | PGA |
| 8. Charlotte Hapak – Rodney Calver | West River |
| 9. Karen Heckman – Flavia Logie | Bombay |
| 10. Susan Savage – Peter Stevens | West River |

FOURTH FLIGHT

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|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| 3. Jasmine Morgan – Liddy Chaney | West River |
| 2. Byron Lee – Lin Irely | West River |
| 3. Mary Shields – Warren Phillips | NCC |
| 4. Dan Lawrence – Sharyl Forster | Bombay |
| 5. Anders Theiste – Ashley Theiste | Heatherwood |
| 6. Pat Muir – Gail Rubin | NCC |
| 7. Lovejoy Duryea – Bob Duryea | Westhampton |
| 8. Freear Pollard – Sheila McCauley | Westhampton |
| 9. Julie Wallace – Nancy Hunt | NCC |

DIVISION	Teams	Points
1. NCC	11	19
2. West River	7	16
3. NYCC	6	12
4. Bombay	7	7

DIVISION II

1. Woodlawn	2	5
2. Heatherwood	3	1
3. PGA	2	
3. Westhampton	3	

DIVISION III

1. Oklahoma	1	4
2. Tulsa	1	1
3. Mariner Sands	1	

-JCO (TD)