



RETURN OF THE NORTHEAST AC REGIONAL



The USCA held its first Northeast Regional Championship since 2019 over the Memorial Day long weekend, returning to the last pre-COVID regional venue, the Lenox Croquet Club in the hills of western Massachusetts. As in 2019, the tournament was a singles-only association croquet (AC) event in one flight, with the size of the field limited to assure everyone a lot of play.

While the tournament did not attract any of the country's very best AC players, the seven entrants enjoyed wonderful sunny weather throughout as well as two lawns that were in excellent condition for this early in the Lenox season. Along with the delightful weather, the players and a few guests enjoyed breakfasts

and lunches organized by Preston and Carol Stuart, a pizza night in the Lenox Club's clubhouse up the hill and toast and tally evenings in the croquet pavilion.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, top seed and tournament director Stuart Lawrence emerged victorious. Lawrence, who serves as the greenskeeper at the Lenox Croquet Club, clinched his second consecutive Northeast Regional with a 26tp-0 final win over Chris Barley of Orlando, Fla., and Linville, N.C.

In block play, Northeast Regional VP Preston Stuart was the big surprise. With no previous sanctioned AC play under his belt, he managed a 5-1 record, earning a bye in the quarterfinal round. He bested more experienced players by a single hoop in several of the games, timed at 2.5 hours, pegging out in two.

ABOVE PHOTO: (L to R) Michael Jeary, Tom Cooper, Stuart Lawrence, Chris Barley, Preston Stuart, Webster Bull and David Ekstrom



Chris Barley

The other newcomer to AC, Michael Jeary of the Rumson Country Club in New Jersey, was a fortuitous addition to the event. Having never played AC before the tournament, and with only a few years of tournament play behind him, he showed great sportsmanship and some terrific shot-making while absorbing a lot of assistance from more experienced players. He left with hopes for an AC-focused member event at his home club.

LCC president David Ekstrom, just returning from his winter home in Florida, showed off his usual smooth shotmaking. In the quarterfinal, he fell short by one point against Green Gables' Tom Cooper. Cooper went on to meet Lawrence in the semifinal, losing an interactive 26-12 game that featured both good and not-so-good turns by both players.

In the other semifinal, Barley beat Stuart on time, 20-19. Stuart was on a break from 2-back with his forward ball when time expired, forcing him to execute a peel on his partner ball and peg out the striker ball to tie the score. All that impressive maneuvering was for naught, though, as Barley replied by hitting the peg from eight yards in his last turn to go up by one.

In the final, planned as a best-of-three match but played as a single game due to time constraints, Lawrence went around to 4-back and set a diagonal spread. Barley hit his lift shot from B-Baulk, but failed Hoop 1. Stuart hit in and proceeded to score the only triple peel in the tournament to take the title.



Preston Stuart, Stuart Lawrence and Chris Barley

FINAL ORDER

CHAMPIONSHIP SINGLES

01. Stuart Lawrence
02. Chris Barley
03. Tom Cooper
03. Preston Stuart
05. David Ekstrom
05. Webster Bull
07. Michael Jeary