The Crokinole Post

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Crokinole King Aims to Continue His Reign

From the KW Record (May 2014) courtesy of Greg Mercer

John Conrad takes a shot at the Waterloo Adult Rec Center during a Waterloo Crokinole Club night (Photo Credit: David Bebee, KW Record)

If you want to find some of the best crokinole players on the planet, just walk into Waterloo's Adult Recreation Centre and follow your ears.

Conrad, a 61-year-old retired Cameron Heights teacher, has been the reigning world crokinole champion for two years in a row. On June 7, he'll try to defend his title for a third time at Tavistock's World Crokinole Championship.

On the line is $1,000 in prize money and another year's worth of bragging rights. In the world of competitive crokinole, it's the game's Stanley Cup, held in the village that claims to be the birthplace of Canada's original board game.

"It's tough. People have been gunning for me all year," Conrad said.

Conrad likes to play a defensive style of game, where he sits on early leads and makes opponents chase him around the board. He shoots with his index finger, the way his grandfather taught him, is superstitious about shooting black discs, and likes to position his chair at a hard angle to the table.

He even has a shot named after him — the Conrad, where he draws his rival away from the valuable centre shot by shooting off to the side when he has an open board. Winning, he said, is as much about concentration as it is execution.

"It's all up here," he said, pointing at his head. "You have to be mentally ready to play this game. As one person said, you have to have your finger attached to your head when you're playing. You have to be totally focused. You can't get upset about the shot that you missed."

To get ready for Tavistock, Conrad is practising twice a month with members of the Waterloo Crokinole Club who meet at the recreation centre on King Street. He's also a member of the St. Jacobs Crokinole Club, and fills his downtime practicing shots by himself on his dining room table, like a point guard shooting hoops in an empty gym.

Crokinole, that wooden game of discs and pegs, lives on in the digital age in church basements, on kitchen tables and in community centres around Canada. It's a bit like a shrunken game of curling, and doesn't care much about your age, gender or strength.

Conrad and his crew in Waterloo say it's the game's simplicity that gives it staying power. "It's got everything. There's strategy, dexterity, intensity and a bit of luck. And anyone can play," said Roy Campbell.

Like most serious players, Campbell was introduced to the game as a child. It was a ritualistic part of Saturday nights at home — you watched hockey on the CBC, took a bath and gathered with the family around the crokinole board, he said.

The Waterloo Crokinole Club's members players are always collegial, but once the game begins, they're shooting to kill.

"It's like chess. It's very competitive. It's a very aggressive game," said Alex Protas, who wears a homemade "Waterloo Crokinole Club" cap on his head. "I think that's why we like it."

In Tavistock, these players are bracing for high-stakes crokinole. There's the pressure of playing all day long against a lot of skilled players, where everything from the humidity in the rink to the gathered crowds can throw you off your game.

"If someone leaves a hanger, you hear the whispers," said Nathan Walsh, who at 21 is one of the younger players in the competitive circuit.

A hanger is like a shot that hits the crossbar in soccer – achingly close to scoring a coveted 20-point middle, but stops just short.

The guys at the Waterloo club take their crokinole seriously, and play rapid-fire games, marking scores on little white cards before shuffling tables to mix up the competition. They also tour as a club, playing players from around Ontario for cash prizes.

When you play this much, you're in a league of your own.

"Sometimes my friends won't play with me unless I use my left hand," said Jason Beierling, a club member and an organizer of the world championships.

He keeps a small board by his desk at work to practise shooting 20s, the centre-shot some call "dookies." Crokinole keeps him hooked because each match can be different, he said.

Even if the "world championships" is more like a regional tournament that draws mostly from around Ontario and a few northern states, winning it all is still a feat in the crokinole community.

"It's not every day you can be a world champion of something," said club member Barry Kiggins, who shoots southpaw-style.

And it doesn't mean you can't brag about it, either. On their way back from a tournament near Buffalo, N.Y., recently, Campbell met a border guard who remarked that Conrad had just passed through — and he happened to mention his high status in the game.

"The guard tells me 'I just had the world championgo through five minutes ago,' " he said.

Louis Gauthier Crowned King at Scenic City

From Clare Keupfer

The third annual Scenic City Crokinole tournament was held Nov. 23, 2013 in Owen Sound. It was officially opened by Mayor Deb Haswell at 11am.

The tournament saw a total of 44 players, this was up 33% from last year. Players came from as far as, Penetaguishene, Belleville, Hamilton, Toronton and Lewiston NY to join the local players at the event.

This years top winner (Singles) who is known for the year as the King of the Scenic City was Louis Gauthier of Belleville ON.

The winners of the recreational division (Doubles) were, Roger Vallancourt and Brian Simpson of Penetanguishene, ON.

The youngest players was 9 year old Abijah Jongsma of Hamilton who teamed up with his dad Reuben to take 2nd place in the recreational division.

This year there was 2 perfect rounds (when both players scored eight 20s each with eight shots. The perfect rounds were made by Louis Gauthier and Nathan Walsh.

The shoot out was won by Fred Slater of Toronto, ON.

Scenic City Winner: Louis Gauthier

Participants enjoyed a delicisous lunch and a had a chance to win great prizes in a silent auction as well as door prizes.

The next Scenic City Tournament will be in Nov. 2014. Check NCA website for up dated info.

Ron Haymes Hammers a Win in Hamilton

From Nathan Walsh (Crokinole Centre)

Golden Horseshoe Winner: Ron Haymes with tournament organizer Eric Miltenburg

Ron Haymes made a rare NCA appearance and took the field by storm, in what was a stormy Saturday in Hamilton, capping the performance with an overtime win over Ray Beierling in the finals.

The forecast for yet another Ontario winter storm proved to be accurate, as Hamilton suffered the same fate of Owen Sound, with several players unable to voyage. After a late start, the tournament was set to begin with 18 strong.

The field split into two groups of 9, with advancements into Group A in the second round requiring a top 3 finish in the preliminary group, or one of the next 3 wildcard positions.

The second round would see 9 players gunning one of the 4 semifinalist positions, and the competition would be incredibly tight. Fred Slater narrowly grabbed the number 1 seed with 42 points, with Haymes, Beierling and Walsh crammed together at 41. After examining the tie-breaker rules, Haymes was given the 4th seed and was set to battle Fred Slater in one semifinal, while Beierling and Walsh lined up for the other.

In the Walsh v Beierling match, Nathan stormed out to a 4-0 lead, but yielded to a Beierling comeback to end game 1 with a 4-4 under the Quinte Convention. Game 2 would be a clear victory for Ray Beierling 6-2, and he sealed the match in the final round of the third game to finish 4-4, 6-2, 4-4.

The Haymes v Slater match would be even tighter. Ron Haymes jumped out to a 4-0 lead in game 1, only to have Fred Slater pull even and tie the game 4-4. Haymes would go up 4-2 in the second game, but Fred Slater would once again even the game 4-4 with a 4th round win. That same result would occur again in the third game as a 4-2 Haymes lead would be erased with a third consecutive tied game, sending the match to extra rounds. However, Haymes would finally prevail, winning the first two extra rounds clinch the match.

That set up a Ray Beierling and Ron Haymes final. In the first game, Haymes and Beierling started with a tied round, before Haymes took control and grabbed an insurmountable 5-1 lead to earn the final game and move one away from the Hamilton title.

Beierling would respond in the second game after falling behind 2-0 to win 6-2, and set the match up for a decisive third game. After two rounds the score was tied 2-2, and Ray Beierling stole a point against the hammer in the third round as the score became 3-3 with victory in sight for both players. However, the match would continue into overtime when the two players tied the 4th round, and the 3rd game 4-4.

The overtime rounds would go back and forth, until Ron Haymes stole 2 points against the hammer in the 3rd set of extra rounds, and consolidated the break to win the overtime rounds 8-4.

Second Annual Turtle Island Tournament

From Nathan Walsh (Crokinole Centre)

The NCA Tour was set to get off to its earliest start ever the Turtle Island Crokinole Tournament was added to the 2013-2014 season. And the tournament did not disappoint, bringing in 27 competitors from 3 states and 4 main Ontario crokinole clubs. At the end of the day it was Ray Beierling picking up 50 NCA points, and the honours of being the 2013 Turtle Island Crokinole Champion.

Crokinole fanatic, Dale Henry, had organized the inaugural tournament last August, which was well represented by the Toronto Crokinole Club and the local crowd.

The 27 players were split into 3 groups of 9 for the preliminary round. The elite field of competition, containing the last 5 singles World Champions.

Reigning champion, Justin Slater, had the top score with 62 points, while Brian Cook, Jon Conrad and Ray Beierling came in with 56, 55, and 55 points respectively. Ray Beierling also recorded the most 20's of the preliminary round with 69. Completing the top flight, and advancing to the A Pool for round 2 were Eric Miltenburg, Fred Slater, Jason Beierling, Roy Campbell and Nathan Jongsma. Just missing out was Jerry Ward who's 39 points fell 3 shy of the cutoff.

The second round of action, featuring 3 pools of 9, would commence to determine the top 4 semifinalists of each group.

In Pool A at 43 points Justin Slater and Brian Cook would grab the 1 and 2 seeds, with Slater scoring a tournament-high 71 20's. Ray Beierling would cruise to the 3rd spot with 40 points, while Jon Conrad (34 points) narrowly edged Roy Campbell (32 points) for the final spot in the playoffs.

So the semifinals were set, both containing world championship rematches. In the 1-4 match, the 2012 WCC final was recreated at Justin Slater battled Jon Conrad. The 2-3 match was a repeat of the 2011 WCC final between Brian Cook and Ray Beierling. Interestingly enough, the WCC results would repeat as Conrad and Beierling prevailed. The last time the two met in a final was the 2010 Joe Fulop Crokinole Tournament in Exeter that saw Ray Beierling defeat Jon Conrad on his way to tying for the NCA title with Justin Slater.

This year Ray Beierling would succeed again, winning 5-3, 6-2 to take the 2013 Turtle Island Crokinole Championship.

With the win Ray Beierling can add another achievement to his crokinole career, and also becomes the newly ranked #1 by CrokinoleCentre in the Singles category, by a narrow 5 points.

The 3nd Annual TURTLES ISLAND Crokinole Tournament will take place on Saturday, August 9th at the Tuscarora Community House: 5226 Walmore Road, Lewiston, NY 14092

St. Jacobs Claims the Team Title in Kitchener

From Nathan Walsh (Crokinole Centre)

Team St. Jacobs: Paul Brubacher, Jon Conrad, Fred Slater and Roy Campbell

The St. Jacob's Crokinole Club won the 22nd edition of the Joseph Schneider Haus invitational crokinole tournament, and in doing so became the winningest crokinole club in tournament history.

The tournament's format is a simple singles round-robin, each player facing each other with the exception of your own teammates. After the full 16 games the scores are tallied and the top team (based on the 4 individual scores) is crowned the champion.

A popular feature of the tournament among the players is not in the gameplay of crokinole however, but in the great display of hospitality shown by the curators of the Joseph Schneider Haus museum. This year a vast array of delectable treats kept many players begging for more.

St. Jacob's had a very strong day and were able to place all four players in the top 10 individual spots. That would be enough to win the tournament as they scored a collective of 304 points.

A congratulations must be given to Quinte as well for taking second place in their first attendance at the event.

By winning on Saturday St. Jacob's reached a total of 9 Joseph Schneider Haus victories, finally surpassing the legendary Cameron Heights Teachers who had been at the front of the title race since 1994.

NCA Tournament Winners for 2013-2014

World Championships, Tavistock (Doubles) - Justin Slater and Fred Slater
World Championships, Tavistock (Singles) - Jon Conrad
Turtle Island, Lewiston (Singles) - Ray Beierling
Belleville Challenge (Singles) - Nathan Walsh
Ontario Championship, Brucefield (Doubles) - Ray Beierling and Jason Beierling
Scenic City, Owen Sound (Singles) - Louis Gauthier
Golden Horseshoe, Hamilton (Singles) - Ron Haymes
Forest City, London (Singles) - Nathan Walsh
British Columbia Championship (Singles) - Adrian Conradi
British Columbia Championship (Doubles) - Jody Good and Michael Hughes
Nactional Crokinole Assocation Tour Final, St. Jacobs (Singles) - Justin Slater

Beierlings Win Ontario Doubles Title

From Ray Beierling

Ontario Doubles Champions: Ray Beierling and Jason Beierling

Ontario Doubles Rec Champions: Jim Bell and Conrad Sitter (with tournament hosts: Ray Beierling (Crokinole Depot) and Joan Beierling (Varna Crokinole Club)

Crokinole Depot and the Varna Crokinole Club hosted the 4th Annual Ontario Doubles Crokinole Championship. The event was held on November 2nd at the Brucefield United Church.

26 teams entered the tournament in search of the ODCC title and at the end of the day only one team remained standing. With 52 players, the day started a little slow with rotation complications and timing conflicts. 6 rounds were used as opposed to the traditional 4 and things were just getting rolling when the lunch break hit. The lunch which was partially donated by Wayne Beierling and was prepared by Sarah and Joan Beierling and an eager bunch of Varna Crokinole Club volunteers. Local eggs, bread and lunch meat, along with vegetables and home made cookies really slowed a few teams down.

The afternoon rolled along smoothly and whittled the competition down to 8 teams. The top 4 recreational played a relaxing round robin to determine a winning team. Congratulations to Conrad Sitter and Jim Bell of Exeter.

The Competitive division settled in for a Page Playoff. It proved to work out very well and it will be used in future ODCC events. Jason and Ray Beierling edged out Ron and Ray Haymes of Wainfleet for the victory. Thanks goes out to all the helpers, participants and players who travelled several hours to compete.

Next year's tournament has been scheduled for Oct. 18th at the Brucefield United Church. Please watch crokinoledepot.com for more details.

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