

# NC CROQUET

WINTER 2007



## My Life in Croquet

by Becky Essick

Hopefully this will become the first in a series of profiles of NC Croquet players. Since they always say to write from experience, I decided to make this first one a personal one from my heart. Like so many of you, my foray into croquet came in the back yard. I think all of us have played 9 wicket with those lightweight mallets and pliable wire wickets. Local rules prevailed, home court advantage was deadly. I will say our games were always lively, with much debate (that's putting it politely!) as to the boundaries, positions and "kills".

Our family was no different than many others... every Sunday afternoon meant croquet in our front yard. My husband, Casper, and his brothers played game after game, with a porch full of spectators commenting on the game. Our oldest son, Jonathan, soon came of age, and was able to play with the big boys. I watched in pride as he held his own.

As Jon matured, his athletic abilities became apparent. Sports prowess came easily with basketball and golf. Although we, as a family, played golf routinely a couple times a week during his teen years, I never made it to his level. We are a very competitive family and believe me, I tried! When Jon was at NC State studying Agronomy, he discovered the courts at Pinehurst. He came home all excited about the beautiful croquet courts he had seen. Mack invited Jon, his uncle and Casper down to watch a tournament. Nothing would do but to build one so the family could play "the right way". After he and his father built it and bought a used greens mower, Casper had wickets made to the specifications Jon had found online. He even had mallets made, heavier than the back yard set we had. Makings of a great time? It was a little too calm and polite for the Essick clan. So the pretty green court lay idle. That is, until that fateful evening Mike Lambros, the softball coach at North Davidson High School, introduced Jon to one of his friends, Danny Huneycutt, and the rest is history...

That was almost six years ago. During that time Casper, Jon and myself have played many matches with varying skill levels.



Jon Essick executes a take-off

Croquet became a wonderful cohesive sport for our family. Competitive spirit abounds as we routinely try to out-do the other. As Jon's children were constantly around our court on Sundays, Matthew (who has inherited the competitive edge) began to play. He has now advanced to tournament play, as has his older sister, Sarah, who just competed in her first Junior Tourney. We have three generations playing together. That is the joy of our sport. It knows no boundaries as to gender or age. Championship players willingly play games with beginners. It truly is a game for a lifetime.

I've had a lot of croquet moments of which I can be proud. Winning my first tournament; Climbing the ranks, being excited and scared every time I moved up to a new flight; Watching Matthew play with his Grandpa in Linville...but the best thing was being partnered with my son in the Southeast Regional this year. After 5 years, I had finally brought my handicap to a level that allowed us to play together. We got off to a ragged start, won some tough matches, and lost a few, but by the end, we were playing as a team. I saw respect in my son's eyes. Respect for the hard work and practice. Respect for the skills acquired. And pride in what we had become~a team.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN NC

March 3-4 Pinehurst Association Rules Clinic

March 22-25 Pinehurst NC Open Qualifying Championship Flights

April 12-15 Pinehurst Championship Flight

May 17-21 Pinehurst SE Regionals

July 26-29 Linville NC Club Team Doubles

Sept 7,8 & 9 Linville NC State Singles Championship

*Dear fellow Croqueteers:  
I hope you will enjoy getting to know your fellow competitors on a more personal note. Please keep the newsletter in mind and please send me any and all requests, complaints and most of all...NEWS!  
Next issue: Spring 2007  
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# DANNY DOWN UNDER

There is nothing like competing for your country in the World Croquet Federation Team Championship, affectionately known as the MacRobertson Shield. As intense as the competition was, what impressed Danna and me was the genuine kindness and affection we received from the spectators, tournament personnel and players while in Australia.

The spectators included a who's who of the croquet world and droves of locals. I was impressed with the croquet knowledge and understanding the local spectators demonstrated during courtside and after-play conversations. They were always hungry for any information a player would share. I was taken back a bit when someone asked me to autograph their program but after 15-20 others followed during the 15-day competition I thought it was pretty cool and of course all the players were more than willing to oblige. There were even some players who collected signatures from opposing teams. It was definitely an honor to play before so many spectators, some who were there for eight hours a day every day. While practicing the day before the competition began I walked over to a couple to inquire what type of insect repellent and sun screen I should use.

After making a mental note of their suggestions and where I could purchase I continued practicing. I had not noticed the couple had relocated but after about two hours they returned with a small sack from a nearby store. They called me over and handed me what would help me survive the sun and flies for the next 15 days and disallowed any kind of reimbursement. Though it seemed status quo during our stay how many times in your life have you given or received that type of generosity from a stranger?

Each country's team was fierce and respectful competitors with each

other on the court but one of the highlights of the event was the camaraderie between the teams. One evening the USA team would host a cookout for New Zealand, later in the week Great Britain would have us over to their place. David Maugham of Great Britain surely was crowned the top BBQ chef of the world, producing lamb chops, burgers and sausages to die for. The atmosphere of these cookouts was awesomely laid-back and pleasantly unguarded and shoes were definitely not required.

It was also impressive to see the appreciation and respect players showed toward the all the volunteers and tournament administrators. Great Britain even had a cookout for all the volunteers of which most attended. The next day I overheard a couple of the volunteers discussing how special all the players had made them feel. They were special and deserve the luxury of feeling special. I believe all the players especially looked forward to going to the Shepparton Croquet Club for doubles every other day, not for croquet but the lunches, sweets and afternoon tea which the lady members prepared. They took a lot of pride for good reason in their cooking and were genuinely satisfied that we all enjoyed it so well.

The USA Team presented their club with a Camp David rose bush and a team photograph and the other teams made their own presentations. We were all moved by their response to receiving the team gifts.

Next time any of our paths cross we would love to tell you about the many other experiences during the MacRob in Australia, such as the team cover sign, left hand driving, road trains and many others. We also look forward to passing on new croquet insights and methods we learned.



## CLUB NOTES

### GRANDFATHER COUNTRY CLUB

The croquet courts have been in full operation during August because of our GGCC Croquet Association Championships. Our 2006 Club Champion is **Nancy Dowdy**. She defeated **Marty Ormsby** in an exciting morning match for the participants and all of the observers. Our 2006 Club Doubles Champions are **Marty Ormsby** and **Ruthie Windsor Mann**, who defended their title by thwarting the play of **Nancy Dowdy** and **Bud Battle** in an afternoon match on August 27th. **Lella Felker** was the winner of the first flight when

she succeeded in winning over Janet Tingle in double overtime.

Due to Ernesto and the ensuing rain, our Crocathalon was cancelled, but our Golf Croquet Championship was held on Labor Day in spite of an ominous weather pattern. The entry fee was five dollars and a blind draw was held for partners. Winning \$40 each were **Marty Ormsby** and **Mary Stuart Hartmann**. This inaugural event was such a success that it was decided to continue it for next year.

Outgoing president, **Margie Owsley**, and **Tom Bishop** lowered the flag to end another successful croquet season.

### BLACK MOUNTAIN CLUB

While the club as a whole isn't doing much, **Keith Nelson** has been roving the countryside, always on the lookout for a croquet tournament. In November, he ventured down to Florida for the USCA Seniors and Masters Championships.

He will be playing at Winter Park in March, then in April at Hampton Beach, and will of course, be at the South East Regionals in May.





# JUNIORS



*Ryan, Jonathan, Katie, Jordan, David, Travis, Coach Hartmann and Matthew played earlier this year at Pinehurst.*

## GAMEWELL CROQUET CLUB

The croquet kids have continued to play steadily all through the year. Tough kids, they won't let freezing cold weather stop them! Their membership has swelled to 71, encompassing 6th, 7th and 8th Graders. Playing croquet when you're 12 and 13 has its own unique set of problems and obstacles that we, as adults don't give a thought. Parents have to work out transportation to practice and tournaments. Grades, attendance and behavior are standard for club membership. As the kids get older, many develop other sports interest and play sanctioned sports for their school.

Bill and his crew have traveled to Pinehurst for a two day tournament on November 18th and 19th. Saturday play was for seeding. All won at least one game. After 7 games, **David Maxon** earned first seed with five wins and only two losses.

Sunday was a single elimination tournament. The new sixth grade players almost upset the more experienced 7th and 8th grade players. This is their third visit to Pinehurst and their fourth tournament.

**David Maxon** defeated **Ryan Sigmon** 7 to 4. David was convinced he had to play Ron Lloyd for the winner's trophy - just a friendly game for a shiny thing. Many thanks to Ron Lloyd and Horace Hayworth for encouraging Geraldine and Dulip to play with their children.

On December 9th, they came down the mountain to visit Steve Summer's court in Midway

**Matthew Essick** won all of his 8 games. Matthew won his first game with **James Ray** 7 to 6 by scoring from the baseline. James's blue

ball was two feet away from the third wicket. Earlier James made a seven foot jump shot at the same third wicket.

**Sarah Essick** almost made the finals a brother and sister competition. Sarah had already negotiated with Matthew. He promised to spot her three points.

Players were so excited that they phoned their parents and friends several times, some after each game.

Seeding:

1. Matthew 6 - 0
2. James 5 - 1
3. Allie 3 - 3
4. McKenna 3 - 3
5. Sarah 2 - 4
6. Taiwan 1 - 5
7. Katrina 1 - 5

Matthew and Sarah are members of Meadows. Other juniors are members of Gamewell Middle School. This is Sarah's first tournament, and the first tournament for the Gamewell players.

Danny Huneycutt instructed by playing a game with James Ray and explaining the strategy of each shot.

Nine adults watched the Juniors. Tony Reeves from Meadows, Danny just returning from Australia, Grand parents Becky and Casper Essick, Hosts - Rhonda and Steve Summers, McKenna's parents - Robert and Susan, and Gamewell Coach - Bill Hartmann.

The Results:

1. **Matthew Essick**
2. **Taiwan Harper**
3. **James Ray**
4. **Sarah Essick**
5. **Allie Rich**
5. **McKenna McMinn**

## 5. Katrina O'Quin

The next week the Gamewell Gang had a 1 day tournament at Lenoir on Saturday, December 15. This was the very first tournament on our home court. 11 juniors started at 10:00 and finished by 2:30. 9 parents watched from court-side lawn chairs.

1. **David Maxon**
2. **Ryan Sigman**
3. **Kayla Smith**
4. **Jonathan Mosley**
5. **James Ray**
6. **Gary Williams**
7. **William Stike**
8. **Ashley Shoemaker**
9. **Travis Shoemaker**
10. **Taiwan Harper**
11. **McKenna McMinn**

The next outing will be January 13th, again at Steve Summer's court in Midway.



*Jordan Clark-Brown from Davidson and Matthew Essick enjoy a round of Golf Croquet at Pinehurst.*