

Croquet Federation of Belgium

6th Indoor Association Open

3rd-4th January 2004

Report by Colin Hemming

The 6th Belgian Indoor Croquet Open Championship was held over the weekend of 3-4 January 2004 as usual at the Hotel Chateau du Lac, Genval. The field was the usual mixture of locals, ex-pat Brits living in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, with the usual sprinkling of local talent (quite a light sprinkling this year). The weather, as usual, was enough to send monkeys, brass or otherwise, running for a nice warm spot. The multicoloured hoel carpet, as usual, was extremely fast and made even more difficult by the presence of embedded electrical boxes etc. The one thing not so usual was the quality of the hoops, significantly improved on previous years, with a surface to the surrounding plate which gave you a reasonable chance of stopping within less than a couple of feet of the hoop.

The field of 12 had handicaps ranging from -2 to 10, and was split into two American blocks of 6. Play started at 8:30 am on the Saturday to allow sufficient time to fit in four rounds of play for everyone before the gala dinner that evening. The game was 20-point advanced: you put your partner clip on 1-back immediately after running hoop. This still, of course, allows the really talented to finish with the sextuple on turn 4, but no-one in this field proved up to it!

The first day's play finished with Jonathan Lamb ahead in the Blue block on 3 wins, with almost everyone else on 2. Samir Patel and Colin Hemming were disputing the Red block, and playing each other in the final game of the day, with Samir pulling ahead by three hoops and Colin unable to keep his break going in the turn after time. Triple peels were notable by their absence throughout the day; indeed, any sort of a peel was a rarity, and even a pegged-out game was far from common. Surprise result of the day was giant-killer Richard Stevens (handicap 10) beating David Openshaw (handicap -2) +1 on time. This was the first time Richard had played advanced laws croquet.

The gala dinner really lived up to its name, with food of the very highest quality. Unfortunately (?), John Swabey couldn't make the event this year

and so the usual singing of his jaunty croquet lyrics set to popular tunes of yester-year was unable to take place; not too many of the old lags who were present seemed very upset by this. Fortunately (?) Jonathan Lamb did make the event this year, and so the usual listening to Jonathan reciting his versified versions of old grey-haired jokes did take place; the old lags who were present didn't complain too loudly about this, and one or two of the first-timers even seemed to enjoy it.

Sunday morning started very early (8:00 am) for the four unlucky souls chosen for the early start necessary to fit in the remaining block games; the rest of the field started at the more respectable time of 9:30. The Red block finished as expected after the first day, with the unbeaten Samir winning ahead of Colin in second place. The Blue block was a lot less clear-cut, with manager Gabor Weiner covering sides of paper with subsidiary who-beat-whom blocks and planning potential tie-breaks. It was in doubt right until the very end, but then it all fell into place and Jonathan appeared as the winner with 4 wins, and David Openshaw with 3 wins scraping through on "who beat whom" against the local Charles-Eric Vilain XIII (yes, he's a real live Count). This meant the two semi-finals were Samir v David and Jonathan v Colin. Meanwhile, the remainder of the field meanwhile contesting an advanced one-ball Plate competition.

David beat Samir +4T in the first semi final, and Colin beat Jonathan +1t, coming from 3 h hops behind in his turn after time. Still no triple peels, and still only the very occasional (deliberate) peel at all. But everything was about to change. In the 3rd-4th place play-off Samir started a triple but broke down after the 4-back peel. He was, though, able to regain the innings and finished with a well-executed double peel to win +9.

The final was the only 26-point game played over the weekend, but in the event proved to be considerably shorter than most of the 20-point games that preceded it. After some preliminary sparring Colin missed an ill-advised 12-yard attempt at a roquet and let David in for his first break, which he took to 4-back and left Colin with another 12-yard shot with his leave (and planned leaves were a bit of a rarity that weekend!). Colin missed the shot, and David finished with a beautifully executed Triple Peel under perfect control; straight out of the top drawer, and really exceptional on this very difficult surface. The first one ever performed in this event and on this carpet.

Richard Stevens won the Plate. It was the first time he had played advanced one-ball. David, Colin and Richard got trophies to keep, and everyone got their little take-away present. Now, this being Belgium, what would you expect? Chocolate? Beer? No, what we actually got was a CD of Jonathan's verse. Big smiles all round.

Oh, and I nearly forgot - Don Gaunt won the crossbow and rubber-tipped arrows competition on the Saturday evening. Hmmm .