

“Upset City!”

2016 MASSACHUSETTS STATE DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Tom Poor

On the morning of March 1, the opening day of the 2016 States, if you had surveyed the draws and had been asked to bet on a sure thing, the unanimous choice would have been the **Roberts brothers, Dan & John** in the A's. After all, John and Dan were professionals at the Harvard and Union Boat Clubs, were ranked on the professional doubles tour and had won the States the last three years. You would have lost big, and several other “sure things” bit the dust as this year’s tournament provided surprises along with enthusiastic and great matches.

The **A draw** is never a picnic. Twenty-one teams started and by the end of the first round, the teams of national champions **John Nimick & Rob Dinerman**, and nationally ranked **Charlie Humber & Chris O'Brien** were gone. More top flight teams disappeared in the second round. Home pro **Chris Spahr & Neal Vohr**, pro at Turner Hill, lost in five to **Reggie Schonborn & Simba Muhwati**; **Steve Wetherill &** many times national champion **Andrew Slater** narrowly lost in five to **Amanda Sobhy**, #7 ranked singles player in the world & **Fernanda Rocha**; and **Andrew Matuch & Ryan Thompson** went down to **Timmy Brownell**, Harvard-bound former #1 BU 19 singles player, & **Justin Singh**, also in five. That left brutal quarter-final match-ups. In perhaps an omen, the Roberts brothers fell behind two games and three match points to youngsters **Julian Kirby & Ryan Mullaney** before surviving to win in five. Amanda & Fernanda were no match for the Schonborn-Muhwati express, losing in three. Unseeded **Graham Bassett & Jon Hyett** won in three over former champions **Sandy Tierney & Pat Malloy**, every game 15-14! Timmy & Justin bowed to second-seeded **Doug Lifford & Max Montgelas** in four. Fate arrived in the semis as the Roberts brothers’ string ran out in a four game loss to Schonborn-Muhwati who created enough offense to induce uncharacteristic errors. Bassett & Hyett endured a tense five game struggle with Lifford & Montgelas to reach the finals. Graham & Jon did not have an easy path, and it got more difficult in the finals as after winning the first game, they dropped the second at 14 and the third at 6. Then, Jon’s wife Monica became more vocal, Graham’s fiancée Ashley agreed and it worked! The last two games at 8 and 6 and the A title to Bassett & Hyett – their first!



2016 State A Doubles
Champions: Graham Bassett & Jon Hyett
Finalists: Reggie Schonborn & Simba Muhwati

It was now **Graham Bassett’s** turn to be victimized by upset fervor. He and partner **Fernanda Rocha** were seeded first as defending champions in the **Mixed**. Their road to the finals was anything but a breeze. In the quarters they slipped by Harvard’s **Kayley Leonard & Rob Dinerman** in four, then were pushed in the semis to the limit by **Mary McKee & Doug Lifford**. The latter pair, three time State winners, had survived a five game opening round match against **Ellie Gozigan & Dan Roberts**, then a grueling quarter against **Sabrina Sobhy & Julian Kirby**. In the bottom half, 2014 champions and second seeded **Sharon Bradey & John Roberts** were upset in the quarters by **Hope Crosier & Scott Poirier** in four, who in turn were blanked in the semis by **Amanda Sobhy & Pat Malloy**. The final was a great match-up of four very strong players. The ebb and flow featured nifty reverse corners from Graham and Amanda on the left versus punishing cross courts from Fernanda & Pat on the right. Only in the fifth game were Amanda & Pat able to gain an edge and close out the match.



2016 State Mixed Doubles
Finalists: Graham Bassett & Fernanda Rocha
Champions: Amanda Sobhy & Pat Malloy

Fernanda was not done with being upset. She had won the **Womens** the last five years with three different partners, last year with Harvard pro **Sharon Bradey**. Seeded first this year with Sharon, they scored straight game victories over **Stephanie Hendricks & Lori Stump** in the quarters and **Corey Schafer & Jeannie Blasberg** in the semis. Similar straight game victories were recorded in the bottom half by **Alli Rubin** (Williams '13) & **Caroline Spahr** (15, Milton Academy freshman) over **Serena Fagan & Ellie Gozigan**, then second seeded **Mary McKee & older sister Lee Belknap**. In the final, the betting was on the pros who seemed in good shape with a 15-3 third game win to go up 2-1. At that point, the youngsters decided to go exclusively at Sharon, a strategy which drew errors from her and also from Fernanda who tried to do too much with the few balls which came her way. Upset city – Alli & Caroline in five!



2016 State Womens Doubles
Finalists: Sharon Bradey & Fernanda Rocha
Champions: Alli Rubin & Caroline Spahr

Caroline was not interested in upsets, hence chose her father **Chris** to partner her in the **Parent-Child**. Not too strange a choice since they were defending champions. In the quarters, they defeated **Hope & Wilder Crosier**. Wilder was playing in his first doubles tournament – successful, too, as they edged **Mimi Coolidge & daughter Isabelle Engelsted** in their first match.

In the semis, **Serena & Jamie Fagan** went down in three as well. The second half of the draw featured second seeded **Cole & Seth Koepfel** who stopped **Kara & Max Kardon** in four. Max (Amherst '15) is just beginning in doubles as is his mother, a recent new member of the University Club and fast learner in doubles. The Koepfels then upset **Morgan & Tom Poor** in a three game semi. The Poores were fortunate to survive a five game quarter-final against **Erik & Julian Kirby**. In the final the Spahrs took no prisoners, concentrated on Seth and took the match in four.



2016 State Parent-Child Doubles
Champions: Chris Spahr & Caroline Spahr
Finalists: Cole Koepfel & Seth Koepfel

On the verge of surpassing father and brother in being the recognizable Spahr name, **Caroline** ventured into the treacherous waters of the C draw with **Alli**. This year with 33 entries was like any other - impossible to predict and full of upsets. Seeds fall like withered dandelions. **Jacob & Seth Koepfel**, seeded first, won their first two matches, then fell to **Adam Brinch & Mike Griffin**, 3-1, in the quarters. Fourth seeded **Hope Prockop & Susan Greene** never got out of the starting blocks, had to withdraw and were replaced by **Colin Brenan & Bill Colehower**. They lost to **Ed Johnson & Mark Burns** who in turn were hammered in three by **Ben Thorndike & Ian Walker**, setting up a semi with Brinch & Griffin. That one did not prove too difficult for Ben & Ian, winning in four.

Meanwhile, **Neil Paterson & Mike McKee**, seeded second on the strength of their 2006 victory in the C's, were struggling as is their wont every year. Mike is a former Princeton hockey captain, wears knee braces, battles injuries but has the great fortune to be married to Mary, one of the top women players nationally. With her encouragement they first edged **Will Bigelow & Derek Moran** in a tight four games, then repeated in four over **Andy Goldfarb & John Blasberg** (also lives in the shadow of his wife Jeannie, another of the top national women players). Their sojourn ended in the quarters with a five game defeat at the hands of **Matt Bryson & Will Hearty**.

Now back to Caroline & Alli. Seeded third they started OK with a shutout of **Mauro & Sebastian Stuparich**, then squeaked by **Lori Stump & Matt Silver** in five, surprisingly demolished **Josh Horwitz & JJ Hearty** in the quarters and finally edged Bryson & Hearty in a five game semi.

The finals against Ben & Ian was remarkable. After winning the first at 12, Alli & Caroline led the second 14-8 and on their way. They lost the next 7 points, the game and the next 3 points in the third game, losing that one at 14. Suddenly, the girls ran off 10 straight points to win the 4th game at 4, won four more to lead the fifth and were on their way again. Didn't happen. Ian & Ben ran the next seven points, traded winners from then on and finally won the fifth game at 12.



2016 State C Doubles
Champions: Ben Thorndike & Ian Walker
Finalists: Alli Rubin & Caroline Spahr

Ben Thorndike entered four divisions with visions of four titles dancing in his head. Ben's a relative newcomer but soon realized that just doesn't happen in the States. Reality arrived early in the B division, a draw which annually is the largest – 42 teams this year – and is always filled with serious potholes. Ben & Ian got through the round of 32 over **John Frantzis & JJ Hearty** in three, then slipped by **Mac Caplan & Bob Brownell** in four before hitting **Nabil Uddin & Matt Silver** in the quarters. Dream over in four. The latter then met their end in **Steve Wetherill & Chris McNeill** who had survived two tortuous five game contests over **Dicken Chaplin & Ryan Thompson**, then top-seeded **Amrit Kanwal & JP Morais**. Advancing to meet them in the semis were **Tyler Hill & Jon Hartnett**, winners in five over 4th-seeded **John Hailer & Jon Hyett** then by default over **Fernanda & Andrew Matuch** who suffered a thumb injury in a state singles final. Lost in the dust of another default was the dark horse team of **Joe Cortes & Gary Power**, the latter a very accomplished Harvard graduate making their team a bettor's delight. Tyler & Jon went out rather meekly in three as Wetherill dominated the court.

The lower half of the B's featured a combative array of matches. Third seeded **Rob Dewees & Josh Horwitz** won once, then hit **Sandy Tierney & improving Will Hearty**. The latter held up under a constant barrage to win in five. **Dave Hall & Josh Grodin** were in the same bracket, continuing their annual pilgrimage for a State title with an opening victory over **Court Chilton & Max Kardon**, then a surprisingly easy win over 2014 finalists **Tom & Morgan Poor**.

They fell short once again in a five game loss to Tierney & Hearty, unable to keep Sandy away from making some crucial winners. In the bottom quarter, **Charlie Humber**, a winner in 2014 and 2015 finalist, took on his third partner, **Adam Brinch**, in yet another quest for glory. No trouble with **Hope Crosier & Mary McKee** in the opener, slightly more difficulty in the 16's with the Union Boat Club's **Thad Roberts & Anthony Bardaro**, then a battle in the quarters with **Jesse Lane & Peter McIntire** who refused to hit winners and also refused to make any errors. Charlie & Adam survived then hit real trouble in Tierney & Hearty, going down 2-1 before concentrating even more fiercely on Will and emerging victorious in five. The final was more of a relief as they were able to keep Wetherill from poaching too often, resulting in a three game triumph for Charlie & Adam.



2016 State B Doubles
Finalists: Steve Wetherill & Chris McNeill
Champions: Charlie Humber & Adam Brinch

Remember **Ben**? Going for four, but disaster struck in the 50's in the form of a knee injury to partner **Malcolm Davidson**. They had cruised through the first round with a shutout of **Stuart Chandler & Jackie Rosenthal**, then in the quarters crushed **Sandy Tierney & Jamie Fagan**, 15-7, when Mac had to default, ending a gallant effort. The draw was a brutal one anyway with three-time defending champions **Greg Zaff & Andrew Slater** erasing Tierney & Fagan in three after defeating **John Nimick & Jeff Rodman** in a somewhat more difficult four games. Meanwhile, second-seeded **Chris Spahr & Scott Poirier** moved into the semis with a close three game decision over Marblehead Y's **Chip Robie & Jay Epstein**. There they met the surprising duo of **Dean Williams & Robert Alonso**, winners in a very tight three over **Tom Poor & Court Chilton**. They were, however, no match for Spahr & Poirier, setting up a repeat of last year's final. Greg is a shooter, and when he's on, they won handily; when he's not, they lost handily. The final was exactly that, a split of the first four games, then Greg leading a fifth game win at 9, securing their fourth title in a row.



2016 State 50+ Doubles
Champions: Andrew Slater & Greg Zaff
Finalists: Chris Spahr & Scott Poirier

Ben reappeared with **Mac** momentarily in the 60's before defaulting to **John Brazilian & Lenny Bernheimer**, six time winners of this division. The latter had slipped by **Rob Dewees & Mat Sibble** from the Harvard Club in three and were set to play **Sandy Tierney & Joe Duffey** in the final.

Seeded first and winners in 2014, Sandy & Joe encountered minimal opposition on their way to the final, winning in three over **Jay Darby & Bob Bennett**, then **John Frantzis & Jon Ross** who had convincingly upset **Tom Poor & Rob Dinerman** in the quarters. The final was not particularly close as Lenny's recent return to Boston had deprived him of practice while Brazilian's shot-making was not sharp enough to counter Joe's offense. Tierney was mostly an observer as his partner carried the day in four. That win gave Sandy & Joe their second title and left our Ben with one win in four tries. That's still pretty darn good for the States.



2016 State 60+ Doubles
Champions: Joe Duffey & Sandy Tierney
Finalists: John Brazilian & Lenny Bernheimer

From the oldest to the youngest, the **Siblings** draw including many juniors, foremost of which were **Jacob & Cole Koepfel** and the **Brownells – Timmy & Jesse**. Defending champions Jacob & Cole moved smoothly into the finals with victories over **Katrina & Nick Cummings**, then **Max & Elliot Kardon** to set up a final against the Brownells whose road was decidedly bumpier. In the quarters they met **Mary McKee & Lee Belknap**, sisters who've had plenty of national experience. Timmy, a former national BU 19 Open champion, is a force to be avoided, but try as they might to keep the ball to Jesse, the sisters could not isolate Timmy often enough, costing them a four game loss. A similar fate met **JJ & Will Hearty**, last year's finalists, in the semis. The Koepfels were a bit more athletic than the Brownells' previous opponents, hence more was required of Jesse, only 14, and Timmy could not intercept often enough to keep Jacob & Cole from winning their second title in three.



2016 State Siblings Doubles
Finalists: Jesse Brownell & Timmy Brownell
Champions: Cole Koepfel & Jacob Koepfel

The 2016 State Doubles had 188 players comprising 174 teams. The tournament is now perhaps the largest national doubles event outside the U.S. national championships. The increasing presence of juniors and more club members from places like Marblehead, Cross Courts and the Union Boat Club is both a testament to the attraction of the doubles game and the foundation for even larger tournaments and play in the future.

Full draws, pictures and past champions are on the Mass Squash website. 13