

“When the Cat’s away...”

... **T**he mice will play. And it came to be that Sandy Tierney, 9-time winner of this event, could not play. Jon Hyett, twice champion, abstained. Morgan Poor, last year’s finalist, had coaching commitments at Milton. The mice, sensing a clear field ahead, scurried from their burrows to challenge for a new champion. Alas, the result was a convincing stomping by **Charlie Humber** and partner Fred Reid of all comers, establishing himself as the next big cat in town.

The MFS Pro-Am Doubles, with a Pro and Pro-Am division, was staged over the second week-end in January and represented the 20th professional doubles tournament at the University Club. Massachusetts Financial Services (MFS) was the new title sponsor, using their marketing department to take full advantage of the opportunity with signage, publicity and very attractive maroon pullovers included in packages for amateurs and patrons. The University Club again shone as the host of dinner on Friday, a Sunday brunch and all the creature comforts fitting for professional athletes at the pinnacle of their sport.

The Pro Doubles Championship and its accompanying tournament, the Pro-Am Doubles Championship, is an early January fixture on the SDA Professional Doubles Tour. A new addition this year was a womens professional event, part of the WDSA tour. With MFS, associate sponsors Sapient and Windham, 80 patrons and 20 amateur players providing financial support, the professionals competed in a mini Pro-Am for Super patrons and in both divisions for over \$50,000 in prize money.

A chance to see the top professionals in the world brought out standing room only galleries throughout the weekend. The professionals’ power, speed afoot and stunning shots were the stuff of wishful thinking for the rest of us. The finals of all three tournaments were played on Sunday with five Pro-Am finals followed by the Womens and the Mens Professional matches. The University Club’s Amanda Sobhy & Suzie Pierrepont shut out Dana Betts & Stephanie Hewitt for the womens crown. The mens draw was dominated by Manek Mathur (India) & Damien Mudge (Australia), crushing Michael Ferreira (New York) & Yvain Badan (Switzerland) in three games. It was the 10th time Damien has won Boston, dating back to his first victory in 2002 with Gary Waite.

EAST DRAW - Championship Draw

Enthusiasm reigned as 20 amateur players teamed with their professional partners at the starting gate of what appeared to be a wide open field. Former champions **Amrit Kanwal, Tom Poor, Malcolm Davidson & Jamie Fagan** all had visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads but age has taken its toll on them and relative youngsters **Hall, Humber & Keravuori** were anxious to overtake their elders.

The opening round of 32 featured four matches. **David Hall**, a contender, & Andres Vargas (New York) began with a four game win over Viktor Berg (Vancouver) & **Steve Quigley** whose local newspapers featured articles on the MFS tournament. **Bill Keravuori** & Yvan Badan (New Canaan) progressed in three over Matt Jenson (Port St. Lucie, FL) and **John Hailer**, exhausted from European business trips (not good planning!). **John Blasberg**, a rookie, & John Russell were ousted in four by fellow rookie **Dan Latimore** & Clive Leach (New York). The third rookie, **Chris McNeill** & Imran Khan (Philadelphia) were edged in the fifth by dentist **Mauro Stuparich** & Damien Mudge (New York).

Those results sent the losers to the Northeast draw and the winners on to the round of 16. In the draw’s top half, **Charlie Humber** & Fred Reid (Toronto) led off with an impressive dismantling of Mike Ferreira (New York) & **Jim Bildner**, playing in his 18th Pro-Am. Another three game victory was next recorded by Hall & Vargas over **Lenny Bernheimer** & Randy Lim (New York). Things tightened up considerably when Manek Mathur (New York) & Jeannie Blasberg swapped games with **Tom Poor** & Will Hartigan (New York) before taking the fifth at 7 despite efforts to direct every ball to Jeannie. Manek put away almost every ball he could reach. Another five game win was taken by Keravuori & Badan over **John Brazilian**, just turned 70, & Thomas Brinkman (Toronto).

In the lower half, five game matches continued with newcomer **Dan Latimore** & Clive Leach (New York) losing the first two games to John Roberts (Boston) & **Ben Thorn-dike**, then recovering to take the last three. **Jamie Fagan** & Greg Park (Atlantic City) met **Malcolm Davidson**, a three time winner of this Pro-Am, & Scott Arnold (Toronto). Jamie won the first, got hammered the next two games, eked out the 4th at 13, then pulled a miracle on the last point to win the fifth at 14.

2017 MFS Pro-Am Doubles

Excitement was only somewhat less in Justin Todd (Toronto) & **Chris O'Brien's** four game conquest of Will Mariani (Toronto) & **Errin Siagel** and Graham Bassett (Boston) & **Amrit Kanwal's** shutout of Mudge & Stuparich.

A nifty Friday dinner at the Club set the table for the next morning's quarter-final matches. Humber & Reid pulled a surprisingly easy three game win over Hall & Vargas as did Bassett & Kanwal over Park & Fagan. Jamie ran out of miracles. The road was significantly tougher in the other two matches. Keravuori & Badan won the first two over Mathur & Jeannie, then lost the next two as Jeannie moved up and Manek covered all balls over her head. That strategy worked all the way to 14-all in the fifth where Yvain hit a nick to end it. Todd & O'Brien did the opposite, losing the first two to Latimore & Leach, then winning the last three to move into the semis. The demise of Jeannie and Dan ended the run of this year's four rookies in the main draw.

Humber & Reid again cruised in the semi-finals, ousting Keravuori & Badan in three. It was becoming apparent that Charlie was not going to make any errors and wait for both Fred to fire winners and his opponents to wear down. On the other hand, Bassett & Kanwal struggled mightily against Todd & O'Brien, losing the first game at 14, winning the next two, dropping the fourth and squeezing out the fifth at 12. The final was a constant exchange of cross courts between Charlie on the left and Amrit on the right, each playing for an error from the other (of which there were few) or for a ball to reach either Bassett or Reid who would go for a winner. After swapping the first two games, the pendulum swung slightly to Humber's team, ending the match in four. Charlie has now moved from the mic ranks to winner's status for next year.



East Draw: Champions - Fred Reid (Canada) & Charlie Humber;
Finalists - Amrit Kanwal & Graham Bassett (Boston)

The University Club of Boston

NORTHEAST DRAW – East Draw round of 32 losers

Not happy with losing, four teams went to the limit of five games on Saturday morning. John Blasberg was just a tad steadier on the right wall against Chris McNeill, just enough to win the fifth game at 13. He and partner John Russell moved into the finals against Matt Jenson & John Hailer. The latter had recovered a bit from his travels, just enough to also win a five game over Berg & Quigley. The final of course went five with the Hailer winning the fifth at 12. McNeill & Khan took some consolation in shutting our Berg & Quigley for 3rd place.



Northeast Draw: Champions - Matt Jenson (Australia) & John Hailer; Finalists - John Blasberg & John Russell (England)

WEST DRAW - East Draw round of 16 losers

Vanquished in the round of 16, eight teams faced off Saturday morning, still smarting from their early dismissal the day before. The matches were extraordinary – three of the four went five games, two ended by one point and the other by two points! Mudge & Mauro Stuparich led Lim & Bernheimer, 2-1, got hammered in the fourth, then took the final point at 14-all in the last game, concentrating on Lenny who was burdened with chairing the tournament on top of playing. Poor & Hartigan split the first two games with Brazilian & Brinkman, then were leading 14-13 in the fifth whereupon Brinkman blasted two balls at Tom who missed the first, then lofted the last point into the ceiling. Mariani & Siagel, down 2-1 to Roberts & Thorndike, squeezed out the fourth by one point, then the last at 13 as Errin held up under constant pressure. Davidson & Arnold provided some relief with a four game conquest of Ferreira & Bildner, due in good part to Malcolm's short shots to Jim's right corner.

Errin's efforts in the morning match took their toll in the afternoon semi-finals. They had no answer for Malcolm & Arnold, losing in three straight. Mudge & Stuparich put up more of a fight against Brazilian & Brinkman as Damien took over more of the court, neutralizing Brinkman. It wasn't enough as the latter won in four. They continued their surge in the finals against Davidson & Arnold with Brinkman making several winners and keeping constant pressure on Malcolm. That strategy earned them a four game victory.



West Draw: Finalists - Malcolm Davidson & Scott Arnold (Canada);
Champions - Thomas Brinkman (Canada) & John Brazilian

SOUTHWEST DRAW - West Draw quarter final losers

Remember every team has at least three matches in this event and so the entrants in this draw were really smarting from two consecutive losses. One more loss leads to the sideline. First, Poor & Hartigan squared off against Lim & Bernheimer. Tom & Lenny have been partners for 20 years on the amateur circuit, have won several national titles together...and don't like to lose to each other! Lim is extraordinarily fast and was key in winning the first two games. They nearly won in the fourth at 14-all but lost it on a Hartigan roll corner. Will & Tom took the fifth at 10. Ferreira & Ian Walker (substituting for Bildner) met Roberts & Thorndike in the other semi. Ironically, Ian and Ben are also amateur partners...and also don't like to lose to each other. Another five gamer with Ben & Roberts winning. The final again went the limit, but Poor & Hartigan were able to keep the ball over Ben's head often enough to emerge victorious.



Southwest Draw: Finalists - Ben Thorndike & John Roberts (Ireland); Champions - Tom Poor & Will Hartigan (New York)

SOUTHEAST DRAW - East Draw quarter final losers

Here dwelt the teams of dashed promise, winners of their first match but losers of their second. Hall & Vargas and Mathur & Jeannie Blasberg split the first four games, each ending at 13. The former team finally wore Jeannie down, winning the last game at 9. Latimore & Leach narrowly edged Fagan & Park in four, then could not muster much resistance in a three game final loss to Hall & Vargas.



Southeast Draw: Finalists - Clive Leach (England) & Dan Latimore;
Champions - David Hall & Andres Vargas (Colombia)

The 20th edition of the Pro-Am was hugely successful under the leadership of Lenny Bernheimer and his committee, the lead sponsorship of MFS, the introduction of the womens event, the addition of four rookie amateurs, spirited play and full galleries supplemented by a great dinner Friday evening and brunch Sunday.