

“Kanwal...Kan Do!”

2017 MASSACHUSETTS STATE DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Tom Poor

That's sort of true...certainly it's not for lack of trying. **Amrit** entered four divisions this year on the theory that the more shots you fire, the better your chances were of hitting something. Same theory as last year, and the year before and so on. It's worked in the past and again this year as he and partner **JP Morais** won the B title over a crowded draw of 36 teams. That draw was symbolic of the 2017 State Doubles as a crowd of 207 players, the largest ever, vied for titles in ten divisions.

The original idea of the **B draw** was to pair B players or an A and a C player. That concept had become increasingly difficult to define as the popularity of doubles has created a surge in the number of participants. It was decided this year to create a new “B+” division for teams clearly not “A” but also too skilled for the original “B” designation. **JP & Amrit** were seeded first last year in the B's, only to be eliminated in the round of 16. Giving it another try this year, they were seeded second and held up handsomely in the lower half with three game victories over **David Hybels & David Little** (Marblehead YMCA), **Mary McKee & Hope Crosier**, and **Tyler Hill & Jon Hartnett** to reach the semis. There the music stopped. **Matt Bryson & Zach Harvey** had been equally impressive, especially in the quarters by hammering third seed **Ian Walker & Ben Thorndike**. Zach scampered and Matt was steady to go up 2-1 in games, only to falter to Amrit's determination in the last two games, both at 12. On to the finals.



2017 Mass State B Doubles: **Champions** - JP Morais & Amrit Kanwal; **Finalists** - Rob Dewees & Josh Horwitz

Against Nabil & Matt, Rob played a steady left wall while Josh ran almost all the short ones down, ending in a four game victory. In the final, JP and Amrit parlayed their retrievals into long points which eventually went their way, good enough for a four game win and the title.

JP & Amrit also tried their hand in the aforementioned **B+ draw**. The competition was clearly a level higher, as they were summarily ushered to the showers in a quarter-final defeat by the hard-hitting, first-seeded team of **Jesse Lane & Peter McIntire**. The drama occurred earlier when the latter team was down match point to **Mark Froot & Bobby Dickey**, survived and won the fifth at 8. Even earlier, in the round of 32, **Chris O'Brien & Mary McKee** knocked off **Joe Cortes & Gary Power**, recent Harvard captain and an accomplished player. Meanwhile, also the upper half, **Alli Rubin** and another recent Harvard captain, **Brandon McLaughlin** were making waves of their own with an outstanding five game victory in the round of 32 over **Ryan Mullaney & Zach Calahan**, then a shutout of 4th seeded **Sandy Tierney & Will Hearty**. In the quarters awaited **Greg Vernick & Adam Brinch** who successfully kept Alli in the backcourt often enough to win in four tight games. They in turn were shut down in the semis by the Lane-McIntire hard-hitting express.

In the upper half, the top seeded team of **Nabil Uddin & Matt Silver** had little trouble with **Tom Little & Chris Lynch**, slightly more in a four game conquest of **Bill Keravuori & Brent Berc**, then ran into former national champion **John Nimick & Len Zide**. John still has great hands and court sense but the years have eroded his pace and quickness, weaknesses that Nabil & Matt were able to overcome by playing Len often, making John try too many shots from forced positions. Below them, **Rob Dewees & Josh Horwitz**, a Harvard Club team, were seeded fourth. If you can believe this, 40 years ago in his early 20's, Rob won the first State B tournament in 1977 with **Sandy Bradbury** and has played every year since, winning again in 2002 with **Joe Cortes** and once more in 2004 with **John Palfrey**, now the headmaster of Phillips Andover. Rob & Josh, with experience on their side, made their way to the semis with victories over **Bob Frazier & Peter Goodall**, **Jay Bride & Will Hearty**, and **Sharon Bradey & Ben Willwerth**.



2017 Mass State B+ Doubles: **Finalists** - Will Moore & Ryan Thompson; **Champions** - Jesse Lane & Peter McIntire

The lower half of this 25-team draw had its own story. **Ryan Thompson**, formerly SquashBusters' squash director, teamed with **Will Moore**, a very talented recent Middlebury graduate, to earn the third seed on only a few appearances. Their lack of experience almost cost them immediately as they were stretched to the fifth game by **Briggs Johnson & Jeff Rodman**, then squeaked by last year's B winner, **Charlie Humber & new partner Chris McNeill** in four. At the draw's bottom, second seeded **Dave Hall & Josh Horwitz** were on a mission. Dave is a superb tennis player, played #1 for Duke and then professionally, but doubles squash remains a challenge. Dave has yet to win his name onto the Massachusetts State Champions plaque, nor his picture on the national Champions wall, both at the University Club.

The mission was again aborted when, after defeating **Silver & Uddin**, they fell to the Union Boat Club team of **Thad Roberts & Anthony Bardaro** in a five game quarter-final struggle. A default placed Moore & Thompson in the finals where once again pure power from Lane & McIntire, this time concentrated on Moore, resulted in a four game victory.

Amrit tried again...the impossible **A draw**. The quality of this 22-team draw was most impressive – many nationally and professionally ranked teams. **JP & Amrit** succumbed meekly in the opening round to **Scott Poirier & Fernanda Rocha** who in turn were dispatched by **Julian Kirby & Ryan Mullaney** in four. They in turn in the quarters were edged in four tight games by **Pat Malloy & Sandy Tierney**, former champions but perhaps remembered more for their loss to **Amanda Sobhy & Fernanda** in 2015. This year Pat & Sandy arrived in the quarters with a five game win over **Chris O'Brien & Charlie Humber**, nationally ranked in the 40+ division. Awaiting in the semi-finals were two of the three Roberts brothers, **Joey & John**. John, assistant pro at the Harvard Club, has won this tournament three times, 2013-15, with brother Dan. Joey is a recent Yale graduate, moved to Boston, and the three of them share an apartment. Under John's tutelage, Joey has learned the doubles game quickly. In succession, they defeated **Moore & Thompson** in three quick games, second seeded **Doug Lifford & Max Montgelas** in four and **Pat & Sandy** in four as well to reach the finals.



2017 Mass State A Doubles: **Champions** - Joey Roberts & John Roberts; **Finalists** - Hameed Ahmed & Dan Roberts

The third of the three Roberts, **Dan**, teamed with **Hameed Ahmed**, an assistant coach at Harvard. It was clear they would be a force when they won the first game against **Lane & McIntire** at 1, then 10 & 9. They continued with a four game upset of defending champions **Graham Bassett & Jon Hyett** for a semi-final meeting with the Cinderella team of **Carson Spahr & Will Hartigan**. Carson's a sophomore at Dartmouth and #2 on the mens team. Will recently moved to Boston from New York and is on the professional circuit. Having never played together, they meshed right away against **John Nimick & Dave Hall** in three, then in the quarters handled **Timmy Brownell & Justin Singh** in four. Midnight struck in the semis when Dan & Hameed won two of the first three games, then coasted in the fourth. The final was a battle, as promised, with Dan taking the first at 14, Joey & John the second and third at 14, Dan & Hameed smoking the brothers at 3 in the fourth and then a down-to-the wire fifth game at 13 to Joey & John. Either way, three trophies went back to the apartment.

JP & Amrit at this point were one for three. Since JP did not qualify for the 50's, Amrit secured the services of many time State winner **Doug Lifford**, newly turned 50...nobody has ever accused Amrit of being short on smarts or persuasion! They breezed through **Bob Frazier & Peter Goodall**, **Tom Poor & Jeff Rodman** and surprisingly, second-seeded **Scott Poirier & John Nimick**, all in three straight games, to reach the finals. In the upper half, defending champions and four time winners **Greg Zaff & Andrew Slater** had momentary trouble with Marblehead's **Chip Robie & Jay Epstein**, then an easy three game win over **Dean Williams & Robert Alonso** to also reach the finals. Although Greg protests he can't move, he can still shoot and Andrew continues to surprise with unusual choices, both enough to win their fifth consecutive title, 11, 14 & 8. That ended it for Amrit this year at one for four.



2017 Mass State 50+ Doubles: **Finalists** - Doug Lifford & Amrit Kanwal; **Champions** - Andrew Slater & Greg Zaff



2017 State 60+ Doubles: **Champions** - Joe Duffey & Sandy Tierney; **Finalists** - Mac Davidson & Ben Thorndike

Doug Lifford is not 60 yet, but he has turned 50 which put him in high demand for that division. He's always been in high demand for the Mixed, an event he's won seven times with partners **Muffy Andruss**, **Jenny Holleran**, **Fernanda** and thrice with current partner **Mary McKee**. Seeded second this year, the road has become rougher as more talented young women have joined the fray. **Cody Warfield** is one of them and along with **Matt Bryson** lost but gave Mary & Doug some resistance in their opening match. The resistance level went to extreme from **Corey Schafer & Ryan Thompson** who themselves had barely escaped from **Kayley Leonard & Rob Dinerman** in five. Doug & Mary squeezed by with a 15-14 fifth game to enter the semis vs **Caroline & Chris Spahr**.

Caroline's finishing her sophomore year at Milton, is ranked #3 nationally in the U17's and also happens to play a very good game of doubles. She saw most of the balls, held up well with her dad handling the front court, both good enough to win 14, 13, 14.

The upper half featured several strong teams. Last year's champions **Amanda Sobhy & Pat Malloy** were unable to defend due to world #7 Amanda rupturing her Achilles tendon in a professional singles tournament in Colombia in early March. That left last year's finalists **Fernanda Rocha & Graham Bassett** as the top seed. They proceeded with a first round win over **Glynis Gozigan & Isaac Rawcliffe**, an English schoolboy import, then a four game conquest of **Alli Rubin & Max Montgelas** to arrive in the semis. Their opponents were Amanda's sister **Sabrina**, a sophomore and #1 on Harvard's national champion team, and **Julian Kirby**, a former Harvard player. They had defeated a talented **Hope Prockop & Charlie Humber** in four, then **Ellie Gozigan & Carson Spahr** in four as well. Although the semifinal match was close, both Fernanda and Graham are professionals which overcame Sabrina's raw talent to send them to the finals. There it was clear that Caroline would see lots of unusual shots which ultimately forced some errors, ending in three close games for the former champions.

The aforementioned **Sandy Tierney** also played in four divisions with the same result – one for four. His one was the 60's where with partner **Joe Duffey** they were defending champions and winners in three of the last four years. Their route in the 11-team draw was an easy one to the finals. They overcame **Jay Darby & Bob Bennett** in three in the quarters, likewise **Tom Poor & Rob Dinerman** in the semis. The latter had avenged in a close five game contest their 2016 loss to **John Frantzis & Jon Ross** in the quarters. The lower half saw **Mac Davidson & Ben Thorndike** shut out **Rob Dewees & Mat Sibble**, then ease past **John Brazilian & Lenny Bernheimer** in four to reach the finals. Neither Mac nor Ben was 100% physically, Mac playing with an injured knee and Ben with a balky shoulder. Nonetheless, they capitalized on a rusty Joe in the first game, then were blown out the next three when Joe seemingly made every shot while Sandy hit an occasional reverse corner.



2017 Mass State Mixed Doubles: **Champions** - Graham Bassett & Fernanda Rocha; **Finalists** - Caroline Spahr & Chris Spahr



2017 Mass State Parent-Child Doubles: **Finalists** - Morgan Poor & Tom Poor; **Champions** - Erik Kirby & Julian Kirby

Julian had a great partner in Sabrina. Although dad **Erik** is not in the same talent echelon, their partnership was good enough to capture the Parent/Child division for the first time. They arrived in the final with an opening shutout of **Hope & Wilder Crosier**, then in the quarters a very narrow escape from **Jacob & Seth Koeppel**. Meanwhile, top seed **Morgan & Tom Poor** advanced with a three straight win over **Kara & Elliot Kardon** followed by a four game conquest over **Serena Fagan**, forced to carry the burden of her father **Jamie**. Tom & Morgan won this thing in 2014 and looked on their way to another by pounding Erik and taking a 2-1 game lead. That music turned sour as Julian poached more, Erik played better and Tom wilted, all adding up to a Kirby win in five.

Fourteen teams began the Womens draw, one of them being an unburdened **Serena** playing with veteran **Hope Crosier**. Although unseeded, they made waves in the upper half, first defeating **Maddie Latimore & Alexa Jacobs**, then the Harvard varsity duo of **Katie Tutrone & Caroline Monrad** in four close games.

Their semi-final match against defending champions **Alli Rubin & Caroline Spahr** see-sawed for five games, finally ending with the latter team's triumph. Below, **Corey Schafer** paired with **Jeannie Blasberg**, now an acclaimed author as well as a nationally ranked singles player, to first shut out **Glynis Gozigian & Ashley Jacobs**, then survive a five game quarter-final over **Kayley Leonard & Hope Prockop** to face **Fernanda Rocha & Ellie Gozigian** in the semis. Fernanda is a solid champion, and Ellie is picking up the game quickly, enough so that they defeated second seeded **Mary McKee & sister Lee Belknap** in a five game duel, then went the distance once again to oust Corey & Jeannie. In the final, Ellie shone once again as a steady retriever on the right, the main ingredient in their four game conquest of Alli & Caroline. Ellie now heads to her freshman year at Dartmouth as a doubles champion.



2017 Mass State Womens Doubles: **Champions** - Fernanda Rocha & Ellie Gozigian; **Finalists** - Alli Rubin & Caroline

The **Koeppel family** returned in the Siblings with brothers **Jacob & Cole** defending champions. In one of the feature matches of the tournament, they met newcomers **Chip & Brad Robie** in the semis. The Robies play out of Marblehead YMCA, and Chip is a former standout at Harvard. They were constantly battling Cole's brutal drives, not unexpected from a kid who throws 90 mph pitches for the Nobles baseball team, and Jacob's retrieving ability. The gods were with the Robies, however, as they pulled out the 4th and 5th games at 14! In the finals they met twins **Elliot & Max Kardon**, recent graduates of Bates and Amherst respectively. Although they're recent comers to doubles, the Kardons had youth and quick learning on their side, capturing the final in three straight.



2017 Mass State Siblings Doubles: **Champions** - Max Kardon & Elliot Kardon; **Finalists** - Brad Robie & Chip Robie

The **Koeppel family** rose again, this time in the 31 team **C draw**. Again, as last year, they were seeded first but the C draw has a colorful history of upsets and teams coming from nowhere. Last year the Koeppel team of **Jacob & Seth** were dumped in the quarters by **Adam Brinch & Mike Griffin**. Again, quarter-final trouble arose in the team of **Hoil Kim & Zach Harvey** who took each game to the limit before bowing in four. That moved Jacob & Seth into the semis against **Mike McKee & Neil Paterson**, winners of this division in 2006. They are both former hockey players, Mike at Princeton, Neil at Cornell and apply the same kind of grind-it-out approach which brought success at the rink. Seeded fourth, they shut out in succession **Kirin Kachroo-Levine & Rod McMullen**, **Tim Stanton & Jesse Brown**, and **Dan Latimore & Chris Lowell** (2 games at 14). The Zambonis then stopped as Jacob exposed their one weakness – the quickness to retrieve, and Seth remained steady on the right.



2017 Mass State C Doubles: **Finalists** - Ryan Patton & Ian Walker; **Champions** - Jacob Koeppel & Seth Koeppel

Below, upsets returned in force as 2nd seed **Jay Bride & Will Hearty** were dismissed in the second round by occasional players **Tom Little & Chris Lynch** from SquashBusters. They in turn met their Waterloo at the hands of **Ian Walker & Ryan Patton** in four games. Above, 3rd seeded **Ed Johnson & Mark Burns** lasted a round longer, defeating **Mike Keating & Rip Hastings**, but retired in four by **Alex Ginman & Mac Caplan**, teammates on the 5.0 singles champion Cross Courts roster, in the quarters. Inexperience then was a factor in their semi-final loss to Walker & Patton who play often enough as University Club members. The final with the Koeppels was close but again Jacob's retrieving was the deciding factor over four games as for perhaps the first time in the C's, the first seed won.

The 2017 State Doubles had 207 players, the largest ever, comprising 199 teams. The tournament is now perhaps the largest national doubles event of the season. The increasing presence of juniors, the increasing number of women 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 web site.