

WORLD MASTERS ARRIVES STATESIDE

This summer the world came to Virginia. Seven hundred and fifty players from fifty-nine nations descended on Charlottesville to compete at the 2018 World Masters Championships.

The twenty-fifth World Masters—which began in 1976 with men's competition and 1982 for women—hosted draws ranging in age from 35+ to 80+. The list of champions over the years includes many of legends of the game, yet the event now consistently draws a robust group of lifetime amateurs who gather for the love of competition, travel and camaraderie. The beauty of masters squash is that every player is there because they want to be; there are no cash prizes, very little fame and the vast majority of competitors understand they have no chance to walk away with the winner's trophy. The event reflected the ethos of players socializing after a weeknight league match or that banter after a regular Saturday morning doubles game, only multiplied.

The tournament was held at the McArthur Squash Center at the Boar's Head Resort. The facility originally opened in 2013 with nine singles courts and two doubles courts but added an additional five singles courts just in time for the World Masters—the certificate of occupancy for the addition was received only twelve days prior to the start of the tournament.

[The McArthur Center is home to the University of Virginia squash teams, which both achieved top-fifteen national rankings in their first year of varsity status last season.]

"The event came alive with all the players who traveled so far to give the event such a global feel," noted women's 50+ participant and twelve-time U.S. masters champion Hope Prockop. "It was so special to bring international masters competition to home soil for the first time. I am happy the world's oldest and best players could enjoy all aspects of the youngest and best venue."

Play at the McArthur Center was bolstered by best-in-class technology. Draws were available on interactive electronic displays, with real-time live scoring and match updates available via Club Locker and coordinated with the live streaming of match play on six courts throughout the entire week.

• The men's 55+ round of sixteen match between Richard Chin (center) and Jose Elias was played in front of perhaps the largest and most vocal crowd of the tournament. Elias prevailed 17-15 in the fifth.





★ Kevin Klipstein (r) and Richard Millman (l) added Bert Kornyei, 2016 World Masters champion, to the A. Carter Fergusson Grand Master Honor Roll.



★ Two caricaturists portrayed attendees at the Team USA party.



★ Belting "Country Roads" at the Team USA party proved to be a unifying moment for all nations.



★ Australia boasted the second largest travelling team and the most champions.



★ Japan brought some of the most enthusiastic support for their teammates.

The player experience was further augmented with unique amenities rarely seen at a squash event. Directly outside the entrance to the courts were several food trucks, ready to help players refuel after on court battles. Windows at the courts overlooked the resort on one side where many of the participants stayed, and the beautiful Birdwood Golf Course on the other. There was even a specialty beer canned for the event—the "Three Wall Boast Pale Ale"—by local Three Notch'd Brewing Company. Special events punctuated the week. There was an opening ceremony, a welcome reception at Three Notch'd, an open player party hosted by donors from Team USA, a barbecue cookout (or cook-in, after torrential rains pushed everyone inside) and a closing ceremony. Even a storm that dropped five inches of rain in only three hours could not dampen the festivities of the week.

At the closing ceremony, Boar's Head Resort General Manager Russ Cronberg told the crowd that it had been the most memorable week in his time at the resort. He lauded the guests' courtesy, good spirits and willingness to make the journey to central Virginia from all corners of the world. Cronberg ended his remarks with an anecdote from the tournament's food and beverage meeting, "I think some of you alluded to getting off court and enjoying a beer. Well when Mark Allen and I met, we told him we had prepared for the event with a significant number of kegs and cases for the week, which we thought would be plenty. But Mark said, 'we need more than that.' And he was right."



★ The Team USA party gave the Scots a reason to break out their kilts.



★ India represented one of the largest delegations from Asia.



★ Shad Todd (l) and Pierre Bastien enjoy a beer at Three Notch'd.



★ Three Notch'd founder George Kastendike presented Stephane Lussier with a six pack of Three Wall Boast for winning the beer naming competition.



★ The Germans came out in force for the Team USA party.



★ World Masters stalwarts South Africa brought the largest international team with sixty-five players.



★ John Musto coached U.S. teammate Ed Burlingame on his way to the 80+ final.

An abiding sense of community flourished within the 216-player U.S. delegation, led by unofficial Team USA captain Richard Millman. For the majority it was their first experience representing the U.S. on court. On the opening weekend Millman held a meeting of the U.S. players, many of whom did not know each other upon arrival. "I had no notion that after the meeting the group would stand and talk to each other for over a half an hour," Millman said, "Or that folks would come up to me at the closing dinner a week later and tell me how grateful they were to be a part of the U.S. team or that complete strangers in USA shirts had both cheered and coached them."

The match play itself offered a steady diet of storylines that highlighted the progress and growth of the game in U.S. The men's 50+ final proved one of the most entertaining matches of the week. The top two seeds from the ninety-player draw—one seed Michael Tootill of South Africa (pictured on cover) and second seeded Hansi Wiens, former world No. 8 from Germany and now the coach at



★ Jeanne Blasberg celebrated a five-game win with a group of U.S. teammates.

★ Colorado's Rolland Fearn represented his state and country from head to toe.



★ Former world No. 9 Laurens Jan Anjema entertained large crowds en route to his first World Masters title.

Dartmouth—had each advanced through the draw without dropping a single game. Wiens took the first game in overtime and held a 2-0 lead, but Tootill was able to capture the final three games—the third and fifth games at 11-9—to lock in his second World Masters title.

Historic results were recorded throughout the nineteen different divisions. Four of the 2018 champions—three of which were Aussies—augmented their top ten status or moved into the top ten list of all-time champions. (See the full list on p. 9). England's Ann Manley notched her fourth World Masters title, and second in a row in the 70+ division. Unsurprisingly, former world No. 1 Sarah Fitz-Gerald is the youngest in the top-ten title holders with her fourth for Australia, the last three of which came in the 45+ division. Australia's Brian Cook became the first player in history to win five different divisions, adding the 70+ title to his 65+ in 2014, 60+ in 2008, 55+ in 2003 and 45+ in 1995. It was Australia's Geoffrey Davenport who truly left his mark in the record books in the 60+ division by matching Craig van der Wath's record of six titles, which the South African achieved in 2016.



★ 2017 U.S. 55+ champion Jill Campion of England won her second title on U.S. soil this year when she captured the World Masters 55+ division.

In the Women's 75+, the U.S. Hall of Famer Joyce Davenport captured her second world title, her first since taking the 50+ title in 1992 in Vancouver. Davenport upset top seeded Jean Grainger of South Africa, a masters squash legend with four titles to her name. While only one could emerge as a champion, both players are the epitome of squash being a life-time sport. Their history spans six decades, and even extends to the professional tennis realm.

"I was actually hosted by her family in England for a few weeks when I was eighteen years old," Davenport said. "Her mother was the nicest hostess I've ever had in all my years playing squash and tennis, she was the loveliest woman. I told her that before the match. We also have both played Wimbledon and U.S. Open tennis, so we have some history and parallels."

The Grainger name is not a new one to U.S. squash fans—her daughter, former world No. 1 and six-time U.S. National Singles champion Natalie Grainger—captured the women's 40+ division for her second masters title. Natalie Grainger's finals opponent was Australian Melissa Martin, wife of former world No. 2 Brett Martin.

★ In Charlottesville Joyce Davenport (l) and Jean Grainger renewed their half-century long friendship.



He competed in the Men's 55+, which at 113 players was the largest division in the tournament. Brett Martin put his legendary racquet skills on display as he marched to the title against a talented field without dropping a game. He still wielded a racquet from the early 1990's ("It still works; don't change something if it's not broken, eh?" he said after the finals), and clearly enjoyed being back on a showcase stage as he poked fun at himself after the final while summing up a general outlook from all players at the tournament: "Even if we're all a bit slower and greyer and fatter, world champion is world champion."

Fitz-Gerald, one of the most forceful advocates for active masters competition, is also one of the squash's most decorated athletes boasting five world titles on the professional stage. After capturing the women's 45+ title, Fitz-Gerald said: "I've been playing since I was a kid, and just because I got older and am retired off tour doesn't mean I don't still want to play, and I think all of the pros would admit they still have this little fire burning inside." Her reasoning for traveling halfway around the world to compete in Charlottesville summed up the feeling from all of the masters competitors: "I'm mad about this game, I love it."



★ Spectators reveled in the sight of Brett Martin, former world No.2, playing in just his second World Masters.



★ Tournament director Mark Allen (l) and Sarah Fitz-Gerald were two of the event's leading promoters.

2018 WORLD MASTERS CHAMPIONS

M35+: Laurens Jan Anjema

W35+: Lauren Briggs

M40+: Liam Kenny

W40+: Natalie Grainger

M45+: Nick Taylor

W45+: Sarah Fitz-Gerald

M50+: Michael Tootill

W50+: Lauren Wagner

M55+: Brett Martin

W55+: Susan Hillier

M60+: Geoffrey Davenport

W60+: Jill Campion

M65+: John Macrury

W65+: Gaye Mitchell

M70+: Brian Cook

W70+: Ann Manley

M75+: Howard Armitage

W75+: Joyce Davenport

M80+: Lance Kinder