

Bostwick Cup January 20-23, 2017

By Vern Cassin

The Bostwick Cup, named in honor of the legendary American World Champion Pete Bostwick, is contested biennially by national teams composed of the top Over-60's players from around the world. This year the Bostwick was held in the leafy Victorian former gold-mining town of Ballarat, located about an hour from Melbourne in South Australia. Apart from the kangaroos hopping about on the outskirts of the town and on the main wall of its "Royal Tennis Court", Ballarat could easily be mistaken for one of the quaint former mining towns in Colorado or northern California. The Ballarat court was built in 1984 by a local gentleman named John Gilbert as a thank-you to his court tennis-playing physician, and was constructed in classical style with a high roof, steep penthouses, walls that take spin well and a convivial social area with a bar and small garden perfect for use in the Australian summer. The head professional is Paul ("Tabs") Tabley, a personable former Melbourne pro with a quick sense of humor. The club itself is run by barbeque master Chris Strange and his lovely wife Annie, and is home to a delightful assortment of friendly and irreverent members.

The Bostwick format consists of three best-of-three-set doubles matches and two singles matches played off level over three days among the national teams, usually Great Britain, Australia and the United States. Great Britain was the defending holder and was captained by the experienced Paul Weaver (Seacourt). The Australians, with their home court advantage and strong roster of fit senior players under Captain Wayne Spring, looked set to provide a strong challenge. The United States team, because of late-stage dropouts, was unable to field a full squad but was rescued at the last minute by the addition of British and Australian volunteers. The team, renamed the World to reflect its composition, and wearing elegant international uniforms provided by the USCTA, was composed of four Americans, three Aussies and one British player, under co-captains Arthur Drane and Vern Cassin.

The Bostwick commenced with the World team playing Great Britain, and with Team GB highly confident of success following their 5-0 whitewash of the U.S. team in 2015. On paper, Team GB held a substantial handicap advantage in each of the five matches, averaging about 15 handicap points per match. However, the World's strategy of allocating its lowest handicappers to the doubles turned the match into a far more competitive event. Leading off for the World, Ron Paterson (MCC) and Rob Jolly (Ballarat/Melbourne) played a strong first set against Jamie Bebb (Manchester) and Jonathan Fisher (Hatfield), taking it 6-4. Buoyed by their success, Jolly and Paterson went off to a quick 4-1 lead in the second set, only to have the determined GB team fight back to 5-all, 40-love. Paterson and Jolly, with their backs literally to the (grille) wall, managed to defend three set points and then held on to take the set 6-5 to win the match, prompting choruses from the dedans of "*Allez, le Monde!*" and "*cooo-eeee*", a loud cry apparently originating in the Australian Bush.

With one unlikely win under its belt, the second match pitted Gerald O'Byrne (Melbourne) and Vern Cassin against the experienced team of Jill Newby (Holyport), who had competed in doubles at Wimbledon and the Australian Open, and David Bryant, a magician at extracting balls from the corners. After an even start, the World team gradually pulled

ahead to win the first set 6-4 and, building on its momentum, managed to take the second set 6-2. The World then unexpectedly led the defending champions by two sets to none after the first two matches.

The lead was quickly erased in the singles, however, as Arthur Drane and Dick Friend (Melbourne and Hobart) unselfishly took on Philip Shaw-Hamilton (Morton Morrell) and wily Fred Satow (Hampton Court), respectively. With substantial handicap differentials, the results were never in doubt despite the valiant efforts of Drane and Friend. Drane had the shot of the day, however, when his diabolical Australian boomerang serve landed squarely on top of Satow's head, to the great delight of the dedans. After four matches, the overall rubber stood even at 2-all, with the highly anticipated and decisive final doubles match to come.

A two-hour break took place, with the sporting agreement of the Team GB captain Paul Weaver, as the American cavalry, in the form of Steve Hufford (Washington) and Peter Vogt (Philadelphia) rode over the hills from Melbourne, where they had been competing that morning in the junior cousin of the Bostwick, the Cockram Cup. The train journey and lack of familiarity with the Ballarat court took its toll initially as the GB team of Weaver and Richard Moore (MCC) went off to a quick 4-0 lead and won the first set comfortably 6-1. Hufford and Vogt changed tactics in the second set and quickly got off to a 4-1 lead, with Hufford chasing shots down in the backcourt and Vogt volleying superbly in the forecourt. Team GB fought back valiantly to even the set at 5-all but Hufford and Vogt came back in the nick of time to take the set 6-5 and even the match at one set all. With the wind behind them, the American team then played brilliantly to take the final set 6-1 to clinch the overall match for the World.

The completely unexpected victory of the World over the heavily-favored defending champions was met by a wild chorus of *coooo-eee's*, hugs, and delight by the World's supporters and stunned disbelief by Team GB. Many were the heroic stories recounted and sorrows drowned that evening in the excellent local Shiraz's.

Day Two, the World vs Australia, was never likely to bring a repeat of the Day One upset. Wayne Spring's Australian team was simply too strong and too deep. Spring and Jonathan Hamer opened the match by defeating Hufford and Vogt in straight sets, and with a World victory then a virtual impossibility, the Australian captain generously allowed the World to change its lineup to allow the remaining matches to be more competitive. The last four matches provided many good moments but were all decisive, with Pru McCahey and Mike McAuley defeating Ronald Paterson and Gerald O'Byrne, Richard Hince defeating Rob Jolly, Nick Carr defeating Vern Cassin, and Phil Barker and the aptly named Ian Bull defeating Dick Friend and Arthur Drane.

The matches were all faultlessly marked by Paul Tabley, who also kept the dedans amused by his quips ("don't look so surprised; that grille has been there for 600 years!").

Day three brought Team GB and Australia back to the court with Team GB out to salvage its pride. With a superb effort in the singles, Philip Shaw-Hamilton defeated the highly favored Richard Hince with a brilliant display of elegance and speed. With a split of the doubles and

an Australian victory in the singles, the rubber stood even after four matches, setting the stage for a thrilling finish. The final match, with Phil Barker and Ian Bull playing for Australia and Fred Satow and Jonathan Fisher playing for Britain, see-sawed back and forth, with the match finally decided in favor of Australia 6-4 by an unreturnable caterpillar serve by Bull that caught the edge of the bandeau and kicked forward out of Satow's reach. Fate had decided it was not to be GB's year.

Australia is thus the delighted new holder of the Bostwick Cup. Team GB will have two years to lick its wounds, the World will celebrate its runner-up status, and all the participants will enjoy the memories of good matches with old friends and the making of new friends in the pleasant surroundings of Ballarat.

(Photos follow)



Things were hopping at the Ballarat Tennis Club for the Bostwick Cup in 2017



The World team (Peter Vogt, Arthur Drane, Rob Jolly, Ronald Paterson, Steve Hufford, Gerald O'Byrne, Dick Friend, Vern Cassin)



“Don’t look so surprised; the grille has been there for 600 years!”



Between matches, enjoying the Aussie summer at the Ballarat Tennis Club



The happy Aussie team celebrating their victory with the Bostwick Cup.