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Mallets Across The Blinkin' Sea

As one tight little island met another at croquet, Britain's best played American rules and wound up with a tie on a weekend memorable for sartorial zip and top strokes

Sarah Pileggi

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London's 5,000-member [Hurlingham](#) Club is 98 years old, and croquet has been played on its lush, level lawns for 55 of those years. The [Westhampton](#) Mallet Club of [Long Island](#) is seven years old and 24 members strong, and croquet has been played on its undulating, wiry crab-grass since the day its founder wrestled mallet and ball away from his six-year-old daughter.

Even so, four of [Hurlingham](#)'s best players traveled to [Long Island](#) the other day for the second series of what may turn out to be the America's Cup of croquet, playing six matches in two days for a bowl called the Silver Trophy of International Croquet Competition. And great was native rejoicing when [Westhampton](#) played [Hurlingham](#) to a draw, for, in the inaugural meet last August, [Hurlingham](#) had cleaned out the [Westhampton](#) guests, taking six straight matches under British rules.

This time the rules were American, which meant nine wickets and two stakes rather than six "hoops" and one "peg," and at the end of the first match it looked as though [Hurlingham](#) was on its way to another sweep. Unperturbed by drenching showers, John Solomon, a 35-year-old tobacco importer and the croquet champion of [England](#), obliterated [Westhampton](#)'s No. 2 man, movie-producer Henry White, leaving White with the wan smile of a good host whose guest has just won the deed to his house at a friendly game of poker.

As the skies cleared and the summer folk of [Westhampton](#) began to gather, Douglas Strachan, a long, lean Scot who is champion of [Ireland](#) and [Hurlingham](#)'s No. 2 seed, took the second singles match, but on an adjoining court West-hampton's White and his doubles partner, Dave Seiniger, scored for the [U.S.](#), beating Solomon and [Gerald Williams](#), a former Tory M.P. from [Kent](#). That was a pleasant surprise for the Americans, and an even pleasanter one came minutes later when White and Seiniger spotted some croquet-playing neighbors from [Southampton](#) watching from the sideline.

[Southampton](#) has long been the focal point of [Long Island](#) croquet. Its unofficial social leader is the Duke of [Marlborough](#), an avid malletman who summers there. ("He wears a shirt that says duke on the back and lights up," says Seiniger.) So far [Southampton](#), which plays English rules exclusively, has refused all [Westhampton](#) challenges on the ground that the American-style game is rather contemptible.

This attitude annoys [Westhampton](#)'s Henry White, who says, "We've challenged and beaten every other club in the area, everybody but our friends down the road. Now that [Hurlingham](#) has come to play us, it looks like [Southampton](#) realizes we don't just do their laundry."

[Southampton](#)'s representatives wanted to challenge the winners, English rules, but Seiniger, with a cheerful malevolence, replied, "Wait a minute, buddy. You play us; then the winner plays [Hurlingham](#). We've got the only crap game in this town, and it's American rules. Frontier style."

The second day's play began in a downpour, and among the spectators were two water sprites named Tommy and Johnny, who passed out purple flowers swiped from a garden next door. The players held umbrellas for each other and engaged in the interminable discussions of strategy that make up at least 50% of croquet. By the luncheon break, the Americans had won another game of doubles, and the score stood at 2-2. "It would have been impolite to be overwhelming," said [Williams](#).

With at least a tie in sight the West-hamptonites returned in the afternoon in jubilant spirits—fully justified by a split in the final pair of doubles. So the matches ended in a glorious tie for [Westhampton](#), an "honorable draw" for [Hurlingham](#). Plans for next summer's meeting in [London](#), where half the matches will be played under British rules, half under American, were begun, and elaborate compliments were elegantly delivered. Douglas Strachan stood up on a wooden chair and declared: "When Solomon first visited the court of the Queen of Sheba he said, 'Behold! The half was not told me.' Now a different Solomon, with his retainers, has visited you, and the half was not told us of your great kindness and hospitality."