



June 28, 2017

Recap of 2017 Red Hoffman Cup Matches

The story of the 2017 Red Hoffman Cup Matches follows, based heavily on the content presented during the event on www.hoffmancup.org. The first article below covers the Finals, then jumps to a chronological description of what happened in the trenches of the 2017 Matches leading up to the Final. Team vs team results are listed in an Appendix



Arcola Country Club Wins the 2017 Hoffman Cup – Twice



The 2017 Red Hoffman Cup Champions, from Arcola CC (L to R): Dan Macdonald, Captain Brian Celiberti, Trevor Randolph, Ryan Chin, Jim Craffey, Brandon Jonlan, Mike O'Connell and Grant Sturgeon

The 2017 Red Hoffman Cup Finals went to the team that earned it -- **Arcola CC** – with a total score of 218, just two shots ahead of runner-up **Plainfield CC**. Fielding a team of great golfers quite used to winning who were also playing their home course proved too much for three otherwise excellent teams from Plainfield (220), **Essex County CC** (225) and **Knickerbocker CC** (228).

On a beautiful but windy day for golf, Arcola reprised its 2015 Hoffman Cup Championship with a team of stars: Trevor Randolph, Dan Macdonald, Pro Grant Sturgeon, Ryan Chin, etc. In 2016 – explicable – Arcola did not play well enough to make the playoffs. They came back in 2017 with a vengeance, displaying a balance and depth that the other teams simply could not match.

In addition, the beautiful Arcola course also emerged as a champion. With greens running an almost unimaginable 13.5 in high winds, the course required expert shotmaking, the likes of which may have never been seen in the Hoffman Cup. Arcola CC has worked hard to improve every aspect of its facility, from the get-lost-for-the-day practice facility through the 18th hole. The result is one of the finest tests that many of these excellent players had ever experienced. "Tough but fair" was the term that came from the players all day long.

The low round – and *only* sub-par score – of the day went to Essex County's impressive Kieran Purcell and Will Hurley, with a hard-earned 70. Other notable returns included Plainfield's team of young Jake Mayer and Scott Parker and Arcola's Grant Sturgeon and Mike O'Connell at even par 72.

With two Hoffman Cup wins under its belt, Arcola looks to be an event fixture for some time to come. But, with the next Hoffman Cup Finals at Plainfield's home course in May 2018, and a bevy of fine teams lurking in the shadows, the table has been set for a competitive next edition of the Hoffman Cup.

The Hoffman Cup wants to express its gratitude to Arcola CC for hosting this year's Finals. From club president Mike McBride (who joined us all afternoon) to playing team captain Brian Celiberti; to General Manager Chad Chadwell and Head Professional Grant Sturgeon and their staffs; to Green Superintendent Paul Dotti and his talented crew, our every hope and need was met or exceeded. What a memorable experience we all had at Arcola!

These Finals are the capstone to the 2017 Red Hoffman Cup Matches, which included over 400 low-handicap regional golfers and professionals and accounted for 864 individual rounds of early spring golf, more than \$60,000 in caddie fees, and over \$20,000 in donations to the four First Tee chapters of New Jersey. Thank you to the team captains, who prove every year that it is their passion that makes the Hoffman Cup a success.

The Red Hoffman Cup Matches were created to foster interaction and friendly competition among northern New Jersey golf clubs. Now completing our 13th year, these matches have been named in honor of Arthur K. "Red" Hoffman, the legendary New Jersey golf writer who covered many of the players and courses that comprise the Matches today.

2017 Hoffman Cup Finals
At Arcola Country Club on Saturday, June 3
Results

Arcola Country Club – 218
 Plainfield Country Club -- 220
 Essex County Country Club -- 225
 Knickerbocker Country Club – 228

2017 Red Hoffman Cup Finals (best 3 of 4 team scores) June 3, 2017		
Club	Players	Score
Essex County CC	Will Hurley, Kieran Purcell	70*
Arcola CC	Grant Sturgeon, Mike O'Connell	72*
Plainfield CC	Jake Mayer, Scott Parker	72*
Knickerbocker CC	Mark Costanza, Rish Patel	73*
Arcola CC	Trevor Randolph, Dan Macdonald	73*
Arcola CC	Brian Celiberti, Jim Craffey	73*
Knickerbocker CC	Bill Hook, Phil Fabrizio	74*
Plainfield CC	Brian Kilduff, Greg Goodman	74*
Arcola CC CC	Ryan Chin, Brendan Jonland	74
Plainfield CC	Scott Paris, Chris MacDonald	74*
Essex County CC	Tom Collins, Mike Guli	75*
Plainfield CC	Make Gately, Tim Campbell	79
Essex County CC	Chris Blake, Scott Pasquale	80*
Essex County CC	Dimitri Devieux, Bill Snouffer	80
Knickerbocker CC	Dan Moss, Mike Sabat	81*
Knickerbocker CC	Dino Strathis, Guy Manuel	86

* Counted toward team total



2017 Red Hoffman Cup Matches: A Preview

In late April, thirty-two clubs took their first shots of the 2017 Red Hoffman Matches to identify the best cadre of golfers in the northern half of New Jersey. Over 400 low-handicap amateurs and club professionals compete over the next several weekends, culminating in the four-team Hoffman Cup Finals at beautiful **Arcola Country Club** on May 13 (later delayed to June 3 due to heavy rain).

The team with a bullseye on its back was **Baltusrol Golf Club** on the merits of its 2016 Hoffman Cup victory and generally stellar play since it joined the Matches in 2010. However, none of its three championships (2011, 2012, 2016) have been a walk in the park, and have most lately been at the expense of an equally qualified team from **Black Oak Golf Club**. The Long Valley club has never finished lower than second since it joined in 2012, hoisting the Cup in 2013 and 2014.

While Baltusrol and Black Oak have been eyeballin' each other, a few other clubs have shown they have what it takes to win the Matches. Arcola is clearly in the mix this year. After convincingly winning it all in 2015, it suffered a letdown in 2016, not making it out of group play. It's fair to say that these golfers have taken this setback to heart and will be storming every club it encounters this year. As hosts of this year's Finals, if they show up on the first tee, Arcola will be hard to beat.

Metedeconk National Golf Club has been quietly improving its showing almost every year, culminating in a strong third place last year, just four shots behind Baltusrol. On the other hand, **Montclair Golf Club** is the most decorated team in the field, with five wins (2006-10) and 10 playoff appearances in 12 years. With Arcola in its group, Montclair's road to the playoffs will include a big pothole, but this team has shown that it knows how to win.

With convincing head-to-head wins over both Montclair and Arcola last year, **Mendham Golf and Tennis Club** pulled off two of the biggest upsets in Hoffman Cup history. Its overall fourth place finish gave this team a taste of success last year, and it expects to be back for more.

Then there are at least two dark horses to consider: **Knickerbocker Country Club** and **Fairmount Country Club**. These two teams have the fourth and sixth, respectively, all-time best point averages in group play, and are always in the mix. Knickerbocker made the playoffs in 2015 and 2016, and intends to make it to the Finals this year. Fairmount beat Baltusrol in head-to-head play last year, the first club to do so since 2014. They have to be thinking "why not?" in 2017.

In fact, *every* team is thinking that way today. Just like the first day of MLB spring training, the first day of the Hoffman Cup creates competition that will yield a few unexpected results.

2017 Hoffman Cup Groups

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Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Group F	Group G	Group H
Baltusrol GC	Black Oak GC	Metedeconk National GC	Mendham GTC	Spring Brook CC	Plainfield CC	Knickerbocker CC	Montclair GC
Bayonne GC	Rumson CC	Fairmount CC	Upper Montclair CC	Essex County CC	Ridgewood CC	Manasquan River GC	Arcola CC
Rockaway River CC	Trump National GC Bedminster	Bedens Brook CC	Canoe Brook CC	Hamilton Farm GC	Essex Fells CC	Hackensack GC	Spring Lake CC
Morris County GC	Ridge at Back Brook	Navesink CC	Mountain Ridge CC	Roxiticus GC	Alpine CC	Echo Lake CC	Hollywood GC

2017 Red Hoffman Cup Matches: Intragroup Play

Intragroup Play – First Weekend

In what was quite possibly the most interesting weekend in Hoffman Cup history, the usual order of things was turned upside down. Teams that were supposed to win handily often lost, and some teams that are usually way back in the pack have been flexing some muscle. Still, three teams are taking a Sherman’s-March-Through-Georgia approach to the whole thing.

Here are a few details (team versus team scores are in the Appendix).

Historically dominant **Baltusrol GC** was upended in a pivotal match against **Rockaway River CC**, 9-3. Both of Rockaway River’s away teams were under par at what had to be a tough Baltusrol track. **Morris County GC** and Baltusrol are tied with 11 points, with **Bayonne GC** just behind at 9. But Rockaway is in the driver’s seat with 17 points going into the last round of group play.

For a team that has never finished worse than second in the Hoffman Cup, **Black Oak GC** had to overcome Saturday’s loss to **The Ridge at Back Brook**, its first head-to-head loss since 2013 (also against The Ridge!). Black Oak bounced back with a solid 8.5-3.5 win at **Trump National GC-Bedminster**, but led by only two over **Rumson CC** and The Ridge -- going into the last day. There are no foregone conclusions here.

Navesink CC collected its biggest points haul ever in waxing formidable **Fairmount CC** 8.5 to 3.5. With both **Metedeconk National GC** and Navesink both playing two matches this coming

weekend, three teams who are veteran playoff material – **The Bedens Brook C**, Metedeconk and Fairmount – are in danger of being on the outside looking in.

In another tight group, **Canoe Brook CC** walloped defending Finalist **Mendham GTC** on Sunday, 8-4. **Upper Montclair CC** may have both hands on the tiller in this field, but it would not take much for motivated Mendham, unpredictable Canoe Brook and a determined **Mountain Ridge CC** to take control. Saturday's Upper Montclair versus Montclair match should be *really* interesting.

Loaded **Essex County CC** has awakened, with an impressive 20.5 points (out of a possible 24) at the expense of **Hamilton Farm National GC** and **Roxiticus GC**. **Spring Brook CC** is still within striking distance of The County for their match on Saturday, but they better bring all their guns.

Plainfield CC had a good weekend, with big wins over both **Essex Fells CC** and **Alpine CC**. But on Saturday, they will meet a **Ridgewood CC** squad that is having its best Hoffman Cup ever. With a scant three-point lead, this group is by no means settled.

In what looked like the most competitive draw in the Hoffman Cup, **Knickerbocker CC** has squashed the value of prediction with an astounding 22 points and a 10-point lead on usually imposing **Manasquan River GC** going into their Saturday match. **Echo Lake CC's** astonishing 8-4 win over Manasquan River was yet another surprise.

One prediction survived the weekend. **Arcola CC** has ridden its quality and depth to 21.5 points and a commanding lead in its group. **Spring Lake GC** has played well, with a surprising 9-3 win over many-time Hoffman Cup champ **Montclair GC**, but needs to keep it up against rookie team **Hollywood GC** for a high seed in 2018.

Standings at the Completion of First Weekend

Group A: Rockaway River -- 17; Baltusrol -- 11; Morris County -- 11; Bayonne -- 9;
Group B: Black Oak -- 14; Rumson -- 12; Ridge at Back Brook -- 12; Trump National -- 10;
Group C: Fairmount -- 11.5; Bedens Brook -- 8; Navesink -- 8.5*; Metedeconk -- 8*
Group D: Upper Montclair -- 14.5; Mendham -- 12.5; Canoe Brook -- 12.5; Mountain Ridge -- 8.5;
Group E: Essex County -- 20.5; Spring Brook -- 13.5; Hamilton Farn -- 8.5; Roxiticus -- 5.5
Group F: Plainfield 19; Ridgewood -- 16; Essex Fells -- 7.5; Alpine 5.5
Group G: Knickerbocker -- 22; Manasquan River 12; Echo Lake 8.5; Hackensack -- 5.5
Group H: Arcola -- 21.5; Spring Lake 11.5; Montclair -- 9.5; Hollywood -- 5.5



Intragroup Play -- The Semis are Set

Only a few constants remain in the Hoffman Cup this year. After three rounds, some of our usually strong teams have shown clear vulnerabilities, while clubs who finished last in their division over the past couple of seasons have made it to the playoffs. Lack of certainty seems to be the new norm.

Eight teams move on to the playoffs, including last year Finalists **Black Oak GC** and **Mendham GTC**. **Plainfield CC** and **Knickerbocker CC** return to the playoffs after impressive runs through their Groups. But three teams who have little to no playoff experience continue to march: **Morris County GC**, **Navesink CC**, and **Essex County CC** have no playoff credits in the last three years among them.

And then, there's **Arcola CC**. The 2015 Champs did not make it to the playoffs in 2016 and are leaving no stone unturned in their quest for the 2017 Hoffman Cup.

Here are the semifinal matches: Morris County vs, Arcola; Black Oak vs Knickerbocker; Navesink vs Plainfield; and Mendham vs Essex County.

These eight teams will meet next weekend to determine which four will converge on Arcola in the Finals. Here's how each Group went down.

Group A – Known in some circles as Bizzaro World, Group A was a continual source of surprise. Morris County, with 20.5 points, came out on top by dispatching three other very good teams: **Baltusrol GC**, **Bayonne GC** and **Rockaway River CC**. That wouldn't be a big deal, except that Morris County has not made the playoffs since 2008 and has averaged under 14 points in Group play since then. Morris County was the only club that didn't suffer a surprising defeat, testimony to Captain Kevin Gallagher's determination to regain some mojo.

Group B – At first blush, it may seem like this pod had no excitement – Black Oak again came out on top with 21.5 points. But they average 28 points every year in Group play and suffered a surprising defeat at the hands of **The Ridge at Back Brook**. Then **Trump National-Bedminster** showed up, defeating The Ridge 10-2 on the last day and almost catching Black Oak. Sophomore team **Rumson CC** again played well as a new team, with 16.5 points.

Group C – Navesink CC and **Fairmount CC** tied at 20.5 points, but Navesink won the tie breaker with its head-to-head win over Fairmount. Navesink is another team that came out of nowhere (averaging under 10 points in Group play) to lead a strong group of teams: **Metedeconk National GC** was last year's Hoffman Cup third place team and **The Bedens Brook C** is always in the mix. But, something's in the water at Navesink . . .

Group D – Mendham rode a strong away record to advance here, but not without losing its match to second place **Canoe Brook CC**. Upper **Montclair CC** and **Mountain Ridge CC** were close behind, making this a competitive, down-to-the-wire, it's-not-over-'til-it's-over Group.

Group E – Essex County did what many have been predicting for years and dominated, earning 30.5 points. Captain Mike Guli is molding ECCC into a force. **Hamilton National GC** played well, but could not quite keep up, while **Spring Brook CC** and **Roxiticus GC** will look to 2018 to bounce back.

Group F – Plainfield did what we have become accustomed to, earning a strong 26 points. But **Ridgewood CC** stood in the way until the last day, playing the veteran playoff team almost to a tie. Look out next year for Ridgewood to finally come out on top, while **Essex Fells CC** and **Alpine CC** study the soon-to-be-released Navesink / Morris County Best Practices Manual.

Group G – Knickerbocker CC extended its domineering play with 31 points in what some felt was the most balanced group in the field. **Echo Lake CC, Manasquan River GC and Hackensack GC** will be able to chalk this outcome up to KCC Captain Phil Fabrizio's determination to make the Finals. This may be the year!

Group H – Arcola blitzed the field, earning 32.5 points (an all-time record), determined not to miss out on the playoffs in 2017. **Spring Lake GC, rookie Hollywood CC** and always in-the-mix **Montclair GC** have survived and will no doubt be glad not to be in Arcola's group in 2018.

Will the unpredictability continue in the playoffs? We'll soon find out!

Standings at the Completion of Group Play

Group A: Morris County -- 20.5; Rockaway River -- 19.5; Baltusrol -- 16.5; Bayonne -- 15.5
Group B: Black Oak -- 21.5; Trump National -- 20; Rumson 16.5; Ridge @ Back Brook -- 14
Group C: Navesink -- 20.5*; Fairmount -- 20.5; Metedeconk -- 17.5; Bedens Brook -- 13.5
Group D: Mendham -- 21; Canoe Brook -- 18.5; Upper Montclair -- 18; Mountain Ridge -- 14.5
Group E: **Essex County -- 30.5; Hamilton Farn -- 19; Spring Brook -- 15.5; Roxiticus -- 7**
Group F: **Plainfield 26; Ridgewood -- 21; Essex Fells -- 13.5; Alpine -- 11.5**
Group G: **Knickerbocker -- 31; Echo Lake -- 16; Manasquan River 15; Hackensack -- 10**
Group H: Arcola -- 32.5; Spring Lake -- 17.5; Hollywood -- 11.5; Montclair -- 10.5



Semis Results – the Surprises Keep Coming

Four clubs are still left standing in the 2017 Red Hoffman Cup Matches: Arcola CC, Essex County CC, Knickerbocker CC and Plainfield CC. Like a shag bag's worth of Steve Sticker wedge shots, you should expect to be able to throw a picnic blanket over them all when the scores are in on June 3rd. In fact, take away Arcola's home course advantage and they have more in common than you would expect.

For example, they are each venerable, 18-hole clubs, with an *average* age of 114 years. Their courses were originally laid out by men with names like Banks and Barker, Raynor and Ross, with a little Tillinghast thrown in. Each is on just about everyone's top-ten-best-courses-in-New-Jersey list.

All four teams are led by engaged and communicative playing captains who follow a strategy to field the best teams. These clubs have been in the Hoffman Cup for an average of almost nine years. And, while all four rank in the top 10 in average points earned per year, they have only one championship among them (Arcola in 2015).

Here's a closer look at how these teams got here. Maybe we'll have some insight into how they will fare in the Finals.

Arcola – (Captains Brian Celiberti and Matt Headington) After winning the Cup in 2015, the club failed to make the playoffs in 2016. They played this year like they are trying to erase that blip,

taking a Hoffman Cup-record 32.5 of 36 possible points in Group play. But, just when the steamroller seemed to be picking up speed, Morris County GC formed a speedbump by tying Arcola in the Semifinals. Winning on a pre-established tie-breaker, Arcola moved on to the Finals, but not without realigning some expectations.

Essex County – (Captain Mike Guli). Year in, year out one of the toughest squads to beat in the Hoffman Cup, ECCC thinks this might just be their year. Not only did they garner 30.5 points in what looked like a pretty competitive group, they handled 2016 Finalist Mendham GTC easily in the Semis. This is their first time in the Finals; will they make the most of it?

Knickerbocker – (Captain Phil Fabrizio). KCC is the most accomplished team to have not won the Hoffman Cup. They average an impressive 23.5 points over seven years of Group play (third in the entire event) taking 30 points this year before dispatching rarely pruned Black Oak GC in the Semifinals. Knickerbocker is on a mission. Fabrizio’s team didn’t get this far only to finish in the pack, and plans to use its knowledge of the neighboring Arcola CC course to its advantage.

Plainfield – (Captain Brian Kilduff) PCC is having a typical year for them, reaching the playoffs for the fourth time in six years. What may not be typical this year is the maturity of Captain Kilduff’s team. Earning an all-time PCC high of 26 points in the Groups, the core of this team has paid its dues in the Hoffman Cup now for several years. These veterans are ready to win it all.

The 2017 Hoffman Cup season has been marked by upsets and surprises. There is no reason to think that will change. So, in what was shaping up to be a relative cakewalk for Arcola, there may be a minefield or two on the path.

- Group A vs Group H: Morris County Golf Club (6) vs **Arcola Country Club (6)***
 - Group B vs Group G: Black Oak Golf Club (5) vs **Knickerbocker Country Club (7)**
 - Group C vs Group F: Navesink Country Club (4) vs **Plainfield Country Club (8)**
 - Group D vs Group E: Mendham Golf and Tennis Club (4.5) vs **Essex County Country Club (7.5)**
- * won tie breaker



Appendix – Intragroup Match Results

First Day of Matches, Saturday, April 22

Group	CLUB	PTS		CLUB	PTS		CLUB	PTS		CLUB	PTS
A	Baltusrol	8	vs	Morris County	4		Bayonne	4	vs	Rockaway River	8

B	Black Oak	5.5	vs	Ridge at Back Brook	6.5	Rumson	5.5	vs	Trump National	6.5
C	Metedeconk	6.5	vs	Navesink	5.5	Fairmount	8	vs	Bedens Brook	4
D	Mendham	8.5	vs	Mountain Ridge	3.5	Upper Montclair	7.5	vs	Canoe Brook	4.5
E	Spring Brook	7.5	vs	Roxiticus	4.5	Essex County	9.5	vs	Hamilton Farm	2.5
F	Plainfield	9.5	vs	Alpine	2.5	Ridgewood	7	vs	Essex Fells	5
G	Knickerbocker	11.5	vs	Echo Lake	.5	Manasquan Rvr	8	vs	Hackensack	4
H	Montclair	6.5	vs	Hollywood	5.5	Arcola	9.5	vs	Spring Lake	2.5

Second Day of Matches, Sunday, April 23

Group	CLUB	PTS		CLUB	PTS	CLUB	PTS		CLUB	PTS
A	Baltusrol	3	vs	Rockaway River	9	Bayonne	5	vs	Morris County	7
B	Black Oak	8.5	vs	Trump National	3.5	Rumson	6.5	vs	Ridge at Back Brook	5.5
C	Metedeconk	8	vs	Bedens Brook	4	Fairmount	3.5	vs	Navesink	8.5
D	Mendham	4	vs	Canoe Brook	8	Upper Montclair	7	vs	Mountain Ridge	5
E	Spring Brook	6	vs	Hamilton Farm	6	Essex County	11	vs	Roxiticus	1
F	Plainfield	9.5	vs	Essex Fells	2.5	Ridgewood	9	vs	Alpine	3
G	Knickerbocker	10.5	vs	Hackensack	1.5	Manasquan Rvr	4	vs	Echo Lake	8
H	Montclair	3	vs	Spring Lake	9	Arcola	12	vs	Hollywood	0

Third Day of Matches, Saturday, April 29

Group	CLUB	PTS		CLUB	PTS	CLUB	PTS	CLUB	PTS	
A	Baltusrol	5.5	vs	Bayonne	6.5	Rockaway River	2.5	vs	Morris County	9.5
B	Black Oak	7.5	vs	Rumson	4.5	Trump National	10	vs	Ridge at Back Brook	2
C	Metedeconk	3	vs	Fairmount	9	Bedens Brook	5.5	vs	Navesink	6.5
D	Mendham	8.5	vs	Upper Montclair	3.5	Canoe Brook	6	vs	Mountain Ridge	6
E	Spring Brook	2	vs	Essex County	10	Hamilton Farm	10.5	vs	Roxiticus	1.5
F	Plainfield	7	vs	Ridgewood	5	Essex Fells	6	vs	Alpine	6
G	Knickerbocker	9	vs	Manasquan Rvr	3	Hackensack	4.5	vs	Echo Lake	7.5
H	Montclair	1	vs	Arcola	11	Spring Lake	6	vs	Hollywood	6