

**2012 USCA Association Rules National Championships** (6-Feb -- 11-Feb)  
PREVIEW -- *Bob Alman*

Many of America's best croquet players compete in Rancho Mirage, California on February 6-11 for the USCA's Association Laws National Championship. The Mission Hills Croquet Club which is hosting the 40 players in their third USCA national championship in just four months (following the American Rules Championship in November and the Golf Croquet Championship in early December). Not for nothing has the well-managed club, with a maximum capacity of 11 courts (when the tennis courts are commandeered) been dubbed "National Croquet Center West."

Top-ranked U.S. players like Ben Rothman, Danny Huneycutt, Jim Bast, Doug Grimsley, Rich Lamm and Jeff Soo are there hand to compete for the Stark Cup, named after U.S. croquet legend Jerry Stark who passed away in 2010. Brian Cumming From Canada, Brian Cumming has come to compete strongly as well.

Stark was a key figure for the U.S. on the international croquet scene for decades as he competed in every single MacRobertson Shield competition for the American team prior to his death in 2010.

The Stark Cup was first presented to last year's champion, Stephen Mulliner of Great Britain. Mulliner will not be playing to hold the title this year, but as winner of the 2011 International Polo Club Palm Beach Golf Croquet Purse Invitational, he will return to Florida in late February to try to win another purse in Wellington. (It's the year's biggest purse, shared by the top four in the eight-way invitational.)

On the Mission Hills courts, several players will be looking for their second USCA Association Croquet championship, but two-time champion Danny Huneycutt has a chance to become the first three-time winner since Leo McBride accomplished the feat in 2003. Huneycutt has previously claimed the U.S. AC title in 2005 and 2009, and is the USCA "Player of the Year" for 2011, topping the USCA Grand Prix standings by a significant margin over second-place Ben Rothman, croquet pro at Mission Hills. Damon Bidence is the only other three-time winner, accomplishing the feat

by winning three straight during 1988-1990.

This USCA Association Croquet Championship will serve as a warm-up for several U.S. players competing in the World Championship that begins in late April in Adelaide, Australia. Those players are Stuart Lawrence, Leo Nikora, Jim Houser and Peter Bach.

Incoming USCA President Johnny Mitchell will also be playing in the tournament. The Texas (who also has a place in West Palm Beach, home of his bride and former USCA staff member Jayne Everyman) is set to take over the presidency in March as current USCA President Gene Young concludes a three-year term.

Championship finals for the event are scheduled for Saturday, February 11. Spectators and guests are welcome and should contact Ron Hendry at 760-567-6236 or croquetca@gmail.com for additional information.