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A Long Weekend

Perhaps you read my earlier essay on my life as a squash enthusiast. If so, you may recall the end saying that my squash-playing days were over. Probably. Maybe. A lot of that had to do with the shutdown of things for the Covid pandemic.

Well, maybe not. Before the long weekend at the U.S. Doubles Championships in Philadelphia, there was a bunch of tournaments that I played in to reacquaint me with doubles squash. The reason for getting reacquainted is that I had stopped playing any kind of squash when the pandemic hit three years ago. Instead of squash I was playing pickleball, which I could do in the more-or-less virus-free outdoors. Pickleball is plenty social and fun, but it is by no means as strenuous or interesting as squash. Here follows a longish prologue to describe what I did to revive my squash game.

Toward the end of last summer there arrived in my e-mail box an announcement of the forthcoming 2022 Kiva Classic tournament the first week of December. This was a very social tournament that I had been a faithful and constant participant in from about 1987 up to 2020.

I raised the question of partnering with me in the 80's doubles with two of my former partners. David Puchkoff showed interest, despite a possible conflict with an impending grandchild at the time of the tourney. He had been playing regularly in recent months. Knowing of my absence from squash courts, he invited me to come to New York City for a few tune-up games at his club, the New York Athletic Club. So, Jere and I flew there for a week toward the end of October. In addition to some squash (but not enough), we also did some touristic things, such as museums and Central Park. There are doves in Central Park.



As it turned out, the impending grandchild did impend and David had to opt out of the Kiva Classic. However, Hank Palmer decided that his knees and double-vision had improved, and that he'd be pleased to partner with me. He'd (also) be coming out of his (our) pickleball retirement(s) to do so.

We were to play in Kiva's 80+ doubles flight, but it was by no means clear there would be enough other teams to make it a viable draw. In the end there was a round robin with three teams, and we played credibly in both our matches, winning a game in each. Not too bad for neither of us having been on a doubles squash court for the last three years.

The Kiva Classic is mostly a doubles tournament for us older players, but there are also softball and hardball singles flights one can play in, for the same price of admission. I signed up for the 70+ softball singles, that being the oldest bracket. I lost my first match, as expected, to my old mentor, Pat Martin, whom I had not seen since he left LANL thirty years ago. This put me into the consolation bracket, *which I won simply by showing up!* That was because none of the other first-round losers bothered to come to their scheduled matches. Sorry, this has nothing to do with getting ready for the National Doubles, but it might be considered interesting.

OK, the squash bug had re-bitten. I then signed up to play in the Pacific Coast Doubles, to be held in Portland Oregon at the end of January. In this case I would partner with John Herman, a long-term member at the Multnomah Athletic Club. I hadn't seen him for about ten years, but knew he was a not-very-strong right-wall player. I would have to play the left wall, which is normally *not* something I normally do. It looked like there would again be three teams in the 80's, meaning a round robin with grand total of two matches. But, somehow a fourth 80+ team entered, and now it was an elimination draw. Still only two matches (with consolations), which we lost handily against stronger players. But it was a also chance to meet many old friends.

Another advantage of the trip to Portland was that Jere and I got a chance to spend some time in Powell's, arguably the country's best bookstore. We also had a long walk in Washington Park and a nice visit to the Portland Art Museum, which has a great collection of Indian art (mostly North West).



A few weeks after this I received an unexpected e-mail from Bart McGuire. He is a bit younger than me and is a very good squash player. I don't think I have ever won a game against him, although there have been numerous opportunities. The reason for the e-mail was that he wanted to ensure that there would be an 80+ draw in the U.S. National Doubles (which he, of course, wanted to win). But at that point there were only two teams entered in that draw. It wouldn't happen unless there were three teams, preferably four. Would I like to participate? He even had a suggested partner for me, a fellow from New York named Bill Hubbard, who had indicated interest in playing but didn't have a partner. I didn't know Hubbard at all, for what it's worth. Hmm.

It is also worth knowing that I had already committed that Jere and I would drive up to Colorado Springs for the 28th Guillermo's Tournament, just two weeks before. This tourney is also one of my long-time favorites. It could be considered as a good, last

warm-up tourney before the Nationals. So, what the hell, I made contact with Hubbard. It turned out he is a left-handed left-wall player, so we decided that yes, we would be the third team in the 80's. Probably as cannon fodder. I submitted my entry form for the Nationals just the day before we left for ColoSpgs (as it is described on road signs).

At G's 28th there were only two of us signed up for the 80's – George Meyer and myself. We had earlier announced that we'd be partnering, but just *one* team does not make up an 80's draw. So, the tourney organizers split us up and found each of us younger partners so, altogether, there would be *four* teams in the 70's doubles. I was paired with Norm Hayes, with whom I had partnered in the past. We lost all three matches in relatively close games. In my singles matches, I also lost one to a tall twelve-year-old kid named Niels. He was named after Niels Bohr, I'm not kidding. I'm the grumpy one on the right.



So much for the long preamble to the Long Weekend that is the title for this essay. The Monday before the Nationals there was a long series of e-mail messages, starting at 8:00 MST to say that we were now *four* teams in the 80's. Great! McGuire had somehow convinced his brother Skip to join in with a guy from Toronto. This was immediately followed, at 8:15, by one from David Puchkoff saying that his partner was canceling out, having come down with Covid. That is, back to three teams (even though the US Squash software still said four). The next five e-mails described the scrambling various people did to find David a replacement partner, but none was found and he also had to back out.

So the Long Weekend began on the afternoon of March 8 when Jere and I drove to Albuquerque to stay overnight before flying to Philadelphia early Thursday morning. We stayed in a downtown hotel near Rittenhouse Square the next two nights, having interesting evening meals at an India and a Korean restaurant.

Back when we were just three teams, then four, my designated start time for my first match was at 12:00 noon, Friday, the 10th. That was good, since I had assumed, being cannon fodder, that my matches would be over on Saturday. Therefore I had arranged our airfares for an early Sunday return to Albuquerque and thus getting back to Brookdale before supper. Unfortunately, with the shift back to three teams, my start time was *now* at 12:00 on *Saturday*, with the second match at 9:00 AM on Sunday. Thus I had to re-arrange our flights home for later, with more stops and transfers, with us arriving in Albuquerque around 10:30 PM. That would require us to stay overnight in Albuquerque once again. Oh well, kind of more expensive than I initially planned.

There was a bright side to all this: Friday was therefore free for us to be tourists. I had long heard about the Barnes Foundation Museum as a major thing to do in Philly. It has a large collection of Impressionist painting, immaculately displayed. The collector, Dr. Barnes, was particularly fond of Renoirs and Cezannes – there must have been about 40 or so of each. There were other artists represented, and he also collected furniture, sculptures, and fancy steel hinges. We easily spent the whole day in that museum.

On Saturday morning we transferred from downtown Philadelphia to Germantown to be closer to the Cricket Club, where the matches were that Bill and I were to play. It was convenient that he had driven from New York the evening before, which then provided us transportation from the hotel to the club and back. Not much to say about our two matches, as we didn't do very well with either of them. But we did have the opportunity to watch some very high-level doubles squash by the younger players. And to enjoy the Saturday night dinner party.

The next day, Sunday, after the match against McGuire and Bernheimer (we got seven points in the last game!), I changed into street clothes. On retrieving Jere's cane from Bill's car, we Lyfted to the airport in time to fly to Detroit (DTW). Somewhere between there and Atlanta (ATL) we lost her cane for a second time, this time for good. On arrival at Albuquerque and getting to the Park and Shuttle to pick up my car, we found it completely battery-dead. It took some time for the AAA to arrive and get it started. (The kid in the truck had never done a Prius before, and he had to call for over-the-phone instructions from his boss.) We finally arrived at the Ramada Inn and crashed in bed about 1:30 AM. Whew, what a day!, what with the shift to Daylight-Saving-Time and the two-hour time difference.

So, Monday morning, after being pleased that the car started, we headed home. To get some mileage on the Prius, we held off breakfast until we got to the Range Cafe in Bernalillo. We got back to Brookdale in time for Sunday lunch, being already full from the huevos rancheros consumed earlier. The rest of Sunday was unpacking things, catching up on sleep, and clearing mails. It wasn't until that evening that Jere couldn't find her phone! Eventually, we found it was left, in her purse and along with her coat, back at the Range Cafe. We drove back to Bernalillo to pick those up Tuesday afternoon and celebrated the end of the Long Weekend with a slice of their excellent key lime pie.