

Robert Fletcher becomes World Champion

Robert Fletcher, 20 year-old Agricultural student from Dundonnell in Victoria's Western Districts, has become Australia's first ever association croquet World Champion after defeating NZ player Paddy Chapman 3-nil in a best-of-five final at Surbiton, England Sunday night local time.

Fletcher, runner-up last year in Adelaide, achieved another first, becoming the only player to win the Wimbledon Cup undefeated during the 8 day tournament.

The tense final took over 8 hours to complete with Fletcher outperforming his Kiwi rival to win the closely contested match +4, +3tp, +26.

After the first game the yellow ball Fletcher was playing was found to be oversize and out of shape. With just 0.05mm difference between the ball and hoop 4, Fletcher failed on his second time through to give his opponent an easy break. Under the rules of association croquet a replayed stroke is only available if the ball has no clearance in any rotation.

Chapman was on his way to victory in the first game until he sportingly called a fault on himself. Fletcher capitalised by pegging-out Chapman's black ball leaving him with one ball versus Fletcher's two. After a narrow miss from his opponent Fletcher took the first game.

Chapman had early control of game two until Fletcher hit a 14 metre shot to establish a break. Chapman returned fire with a 14 metre hit and should have finished with a triple peel but only managed two of them. Fletcher hit, set a defensive leave and after Chapman missed from 25, completed triple peel to win the game.

After a good start in the third game Fletcher seemed likely to finish until he ran too far through a hoop, missing a 10 metre shot. Chapman, having hoop troubles of his own, failed the first giving Fletcher a shot which he hit. Peeling his partner ball through the two final hoops, Fletcher made no mistake securing the historic victory.

For several decades the association game has been dominated by UK-based players. That Fletcher has been able to achieve on English soil the sport's highest accolade and go through undefeated is a remarkable sporting success that deserves national acclaim.

Blaise Northey