

Pickleball League Championship Decided in Epic Match

By Bob Zyontz

What do you get when you throw a perfect night, four top players, a raucous crowd, and a potential league championship into a blender? Awesome pickleball, baby!

This winning recipe was served up on the evening of August 26 when the four best players on the Pickleball Club's top two teams faced off to decide who would claim the Panson Cup, the symbol of pickleball supremacy and bragging rights at Regency. For the past 12 months, the Cup resided at the home of Gary Ramella, who captained the winning team in 2023. The big question this season was would he be able to retain it or have to surrender possession?

The answer began on June 23 when eight captains – Arlene Goldberg, Mike Coulianidis, Harriet Blumenstock, Alan Schwartz, Mark Goldberg, Gary Ramella, Jay Gummic, and Bob Zyontz – held a 14-round draft to select their players.

Following a week of practices that allowed the teams to bond, play began on Thursday, June 27. The first four games saw Team M. Goldberg defeat Team Ramella, Team A. Goldberg take down Team Coulianidis, Team Zyontz roll over Team Gummic, and Team Schwartz snatch a victory over Team Blumenstock. All matches throughout the season were highly competitive and showed an improved level of play compared to 2023.

The regular season ended on August 12. When the dust settled, Team Zyontz (Team Z) was sitting in first place with a 5-1-1 record, while Team Ramella (Team R) was right on their tail with a record of 5-2. Both were poised to make a run in the playoffs, and they did not disappoint. Each won their quarter final matches. In the semifinals, Team R took down Team M. Goldberg while Team Z squeaked out a narrow win over a very resilient A. Goldberg squad.

It was only fitting then, that the two winningest teams compete for the Cup. In a best two out of three format, the first matches saw Team Z holding a slim lead following a win by Sherry Vitanza Barry Thaler, and Wendy Strauss over Cindy Weintraub, Gita Master, and Ada Operowsky. Then, Tom Cullen and Richie Ragovin defeated Steve Girshek and Lois Ruderman in consecutive matches.

Team R's duo of Phyllis Greenberg and Norm Blumenstock split two hotly contested games with Mozey Ghaffari and Bob Zyontz, while George Rothweiler and Janis Mineroff did the same against Team Z's Sandy Smith and Tom Bury. Steve Stein, Sylvia Smith, and Sheri Nagel had their hands full splitting their two matches against Team R's Vijay Sarathy, Stephanie Horn, Abe Bawarshi, and Janis Goldberg.

At this point, Team Z needed a single win to secure the Cup. After two months of grueling play in the face of oppressive heat, high winds, torrential rain, cancellations, and re-scheduling nightmares, it all came down to one match and the skill, stamina, and determination of Mitch Grossman and Jeff Troshane vs. Gary Ramella and Bill Shuzman.

Grossman and Troshane had been regular partners all season and were in sync with each other having won their opening match 11-2. In comparison, Ramella and Shuzman had only played together a few times due to summer vacation plans. However, they were both acutely aware of each other's games having played with and against each other for the last three years.

As darkness approached, the second match began under the lights. With a large crowd watching, Grossman and Troshane displayed great chemistry taking a 7-2 lead. It appeared that they would make short work of their opponents. Then suddenly, as is common in pickleball, the momentum shifted. Ramella and Shuzman re-discovered the mojo that had propelled their team to the finals and began making shots that had Grossman and Troshane on their heels.

Showing why they are two of Regency's best, Ramella and Shuzman mounted a furious comeback. With the score 10-9, the lead melting away, and facing a tiebreaker, Grossman stared across the court, took a deep breath, and served. Two seconds later, the crowd gasped as the return shot was hit straight into the net. The game was over, paddles were tapped, and a new champion emerged. On an epic night, Regency pickleball pioneer Barry Panson presented all 14 ecstatically proud members of Team Z with the Panson Cup. It was a fitting nightcap to a great pickleball season.

This year's regular season and playoff games have created memories that will be talked about for a long time to come, and the Regency at Monroe Pickleball Club would like to thank all its members who came out to play and take part in all the fun and excitement that makes pickleball so special.

To see pictures of the playoffs, please visit regencyatmonroepickleballclub.org.



[Caption]

The victorious 2024 Regency Pickleball League champions, Team Zyontz, pose with the Panson Cup. From left to right: Steve Stein, Jeff Troshane, Richie Ragovin, Sandy Smith, Mitch Grossman, Captain Bob Zyontz, Mozey Ghaffari, Tom Bury, Sherry Vitanza, Sylvia Smith, Tom Cullen, Sheri Nagel, Barry Thaler, and Wendy Strauss. (Not pictured: Ellen Porges.)
(Photo by George Rothweiler)



[Caption]

Jeff Troshane and Mitch Grossman celebrate the thrill of victory following their championship clinching match.
(Photo by Tom Cullen).