

Team Goldberg Claims Panson Cup In Thrilling Pickleball Championship

By Bob Zyontz

To paraphrase legendary rock band AC/DC, “It’s A Long Way to the Top if You Wanna Pickleball”. Talk to any member of the Regency Pickleball League and there would be little dispute about what it takes to chase a championship and win the Panson Cup, symbol of pickleball supremacy and bragging rights at Regency.

To appreciate the destination, you must understand the journey, and that takes us back to May 15, 2025, when this wonderful and whacky season began. On that night, eight captains – Alan Strauss, Harriet Blumenstock, Alan Schwartz, Jay Gumnick, Michael Cohen, Bob Zyontz, Gary Ramella, and Arlene Goldberg – took over the tennis pavilion and proceeded to draft their 15-player rosters.

After a two-week run up, League play kicked off on Thursday, May 29. It was an exciting start, but then Mother Nature sent waves of wicked weather that plagued us week in and week out. To avoid delays and cancellations and ensure all games would be played and the season would end before August, the games, when necessary, were moved inside to PCM and Center Court.

Gary Ramella, Board Chair for leagues and tournaments, became a master meteorologist as he tracked weather forecasts for heat and rain conditions, made frantic searches for indoor court availability, and juggled last minute decisions to book indoors that saved the season.

If there was one constant, it was Team Goldberg. They led the league from wire to wire finishing with a 6-1 record and became the team to beat in the playoffs.

With the regular season ending on 7/10, the playoff seeding for the quarter finals was set: Goldberg (1) vs. Gumnick (8), Blumenstock (2) vs. Schwartz (7), Ramella (3) vs. Strauss (6), and Zyontz (4) vs. Cohen (5).

The quarterfinals began indoors at PCM on 7/17. After a number of compelling matches, Teams Gumnick, Schwartz, Strauss, and Zyontz went down valiantly, wished their opponents good luck, and went home.

With the weather cooperating for a change, the semifinal games, pitting Ramella vs. Blumenstock and Cohen vs. Goldberg, were played on 7/24 at Regency. As Team Blumenstock prepared for their game, captain Harriet Blumenstock took a bad fall during open play on 7/23. Rushed to Princeton Medical Center by Monroe

EMTs, she was diagnosed with a broken collarbone and scheduled for surgery on Friday, 7/25.

While down, she was not out. In an emotional moment Blumenstock, with her right shoulder in a sling, was wheeled onto the courts by teammate Mark Frankel hoping that her presence would give the team an inspirational jolt. But it was not to be. Team Ramella proved too strong and prevailed, just as Team Goldberg took down Team Cohen. This set up the dramatic battle for the Panson Cup.

The last two teams standing prepared to battle it out for the Cup at Center Court on 7/29. That decision proved prescient as Monroe experienced some of the worst rains in memory. It was so bad that streets within Regency were flooded. By the 8:00 PM start, the rain had subsided, and the games were on.

League matches are set up in a best of seven format, and game 1 saw Rochelle Berger and Barry Thaler outlast the trio of Luba Sidorenko, Sandy Mailman, and Cheryl Frazzini 15-13 giving Team Goldberg its first win of the night. Team Ramella evened the score in game 2 when Firoz Barot and Cindy Drum defeated Michael Horn and Marci Morgenstern 15-13.

The next two games saw Team Goldberg jump out to a 3-1 advantage as Russ Goldberg and Moshe Azoulai beat a very competitive Phyllis Greenberg and Gary Austein 15-9 while Vijay Sarathy and Andy Gerstein shut down Stephanie Horn and Lois Ruderman 15-8.

Now, just one game away from winning it all, Team Goldberg's mojo began to wither. Playing the best pickleball of their lives, Team Ramella's Lisa Citron and Rosemary Spinelli came back from a deep deficit to disappoint Russ Goldberg and Steve Lasky 15-13 in an epic battle.

On the other court, Ramella sent out Jerry Lefkowitz and Steve Selby to face Eva Nyman and Warren Kaplan, and they did not let their captain down winning 15-11. Suddenly, the match was tied at three games apiece setting up a confrontation between each team's best players. One could not script a better ending.

The final game was a contrast in playing styles. Ramella and his partner, Sue Caputo, represented power while their opponents, Goldberg and Judy Azoulai, represented finesse. Ramella and Caputo jumped out to a 3-0 lead, but Goldberg and Azoulai were having none of it. Unfazed, with a cool display of skill, concentration, and court presence, Goldberg and Azoulai took charge of the game winning 15-6. It was a poetic end to a championship night.

Following the victory, captain Goldberg, surrounded by her teammates, accepted the Panson Cup from last year's defending captain Bob Zyontz. It was a fitting end to a roller coaster season, but the memories, friendships, and camaraderie that were forged will last long after the scores are forgotten. This is what makes Regency pickleball so rewarding. Now, the Cup will reside at Chez Goldberg for the next 12 months until the chase begins all over again.



[Caption]

Captain Arlene Goldberg, surrounded by her teammates, is presented with the Panson Cup by last year's defending captain Bob Zyontz.

[Photo by George Rothweiler]



[Caption]

League champions Team Goldberg in victory formation. Back row, L-R, Les Kaplan, Russ Goldberg, Warren Kaplan, Michael Horn, and Steve Lasky. Middle row, L-R, Vijay Sarathy, Rochelle Berger, Arlene Goldberg, Barry Thaler, Marci Morgenstern, and Andy Gerstein. Front row, kneeling, L-R, Moshe Azoulai, Judy Azoulai, and Eva Nyman.

[Photo by George Rothweiler]