

NEW JERSEY WINS INAUGURAL TEST SERIES



The victorious New Jersey team. From (L to R) Madhu Rao, Ravi Shankar, Sinclair D'Costa, (DFG) Atul Kharecha, Atul Bhave, Sekhar Challa, Vishal Karangutkar and Neil Khatu.

Carrom Canada hosted New Jersey State Carrom Club from January 4th to 6th 2013. The aim of the first ever test series between NJCC, who are represented by 7 of the top 14 players in the USA, and Carrom Canada, was to promote the game in North America. Both teams had 3 players each, who represented their respective countries in the recently concluded Carrom World Cup in Sri Lanka and as per expectations, the spectators got a treat watching highly talented players displaying their outstanding skills and tranquil nerves.

The New Jersey team, who had 3 of their 4 players on the US team, started as favorites and as expected beat the upcoming Carrom Canada side 8-4. Moaz Shaikh the secretary of Carrom

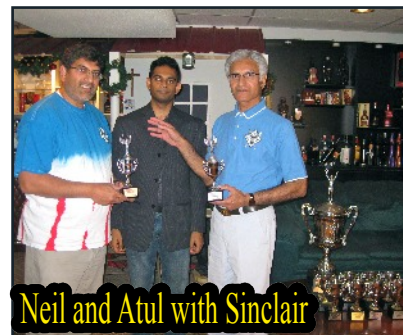
Canada was right in saying "This visit by the US team definitely gave a boost to players in Canada. With such stiff competitions on a regular basis we will lift our game to the next level."

The US team comprising of 3 players who participated in 3 world cups, Vishal Karangutkar, Sekhar Challa and Neil Khatu, along with Atul Kharecha, Madhu Rao, Atul Bhave and Ravi Shankar were a tough unit to crack. And, to add to the woes, the Canadian contingent had a major setback with their ace Francis down with the flu. Francis did not participate in the mixed doubles but played in the test series to keep team spirit high. Qadeer, another excellent player, also shrugged off the flu bug, but was not at his best.



Madhu and Sekhar with Sinclair

Madhu and Sekhar Triumph



Neil and Atul with Sinclair

The event started off with the computerized doubles tournament specially created by Carrom Canada and a program designed by Shad Ahmed. This competition allowed players from both teams to pair up with each other and thus created camaraderie between the two teams. Developing players like Sylvester D'Souza, Nahdi Hussain, Nayeem Rahman, David Gonsalves, Derek D'Souza, Manchu Kanaga and Abdul Khader, who were given an opportunity to play in this tournament, had a field day, embracing ideas from the peers in this game.

After the fourth and penultimate round, Qadeer led the table with 10 points, followed by Madhu and Vishal on 9 points, Bhav, Balachandran Dandapani, Wajahat Mohammed, Shad Ahmed and Kharecha closely followed the leaders with 8 points. Neil, Moaz, Sekhar, Ravi, Umair Kamal and Sylvester had an outside chance of making it into the semis with 6 points each. With the top 8 qualifying, the 5th and final round set the tempo for an exciting finish.

Eventually, after 5 rounds Madhu Rao, a former US National Champion led the standings with 13 points. The surprise omission from the top 8 was US no.1 Vishal who was pushed to 9th place by his team mate Sekhar. The top qualifier Madhu paired with Sekhar, while Wajahat who finished second had Ravi Shankar as his partner. Qadeer paired with his fellow Canadian Moaz and Atul Kharecha partnered with Neil.

In the first semi finals, Madhu and Sekhar overcame the Canadian pair of Qadeer and Moaz 25-5, whilst Kharecha and Neil got through Wajahat and Shankar 25-12 in the other semis. The finals were well contested with the scores level at 6-6, 12-12 and 20-20. Madhu and Sekhar eventually defeated their opponents Atul Kharecha and Neil Khatu 25-20, in an exciting finals winning the doubles title.

Standings after round 5

Madhu Rao.....	13-55
Wajahat Mohammed.....	11-45
Abdul Qadeer.....	10-44
Atul Kharecha.....	10-29
Neil Khatu.....	9-52
Moaz Shaikh.....	9-32
Ravi Shankar.....	9-30
Sekhar Challa.....	9-29
Vishal Karangutkar.....	9-14
Atul Bhav.....	8-19
Umair Kamal.....	8-11
Balachandran Dandapani...	8-11
Shad Ahmed.....	8-0
Sylvester D'Souza.....	6-35
Romulus DaSilva.....	5-12
Manuel Coelho.....	4-39
Derek D'Souza.....	2-69
David Gonsalves.....	2-74
Nahdi Hussein.....	0-55
Nayeem Rahman.....	0-87

Results

First Round: Sekhar Challa/Sylvester D'Souza Beat Vishal Karangutkar/Umair Kamal 25-4-6 >>Manuel Coelho / Nayeem Rahman Lost to Wajahat Mohammed / Romulus DaSilva 12-23-8 >>Atul Bhav/Shad Ahmed Beat Neil Khatu/Nahdi Hussain 21-14-8 >>Atul Kharecha/Derek D'Souza Lost to Ravi Shankar/Balachandran Dandapani 6-25-7 >>Madhu Rao/David Gonsalves Lost to Moaz Shaikh/Abdul Qadeer 0-25-8

Second Round: Moaz Shaikh/David Gonsalves Lost to Balachandran Dandapani/Atul Kharecha 7-16-8 >>Abdul Qadeer/Madhu Rao Beat Wajahat Mohammed/Nayeem Rahman 25-9-6 >>Sekhar Challa/Umair Kamal Beat Romulus DaSilva/Manuel Coelho 25-5-7 >>Sylvester D'Souza/Vishal Karangutkar Beat Atul Bhav/Nahdi Hussain 25-20-6 >>Ravi Shankar/Derek D'Souza Lost to Shad Ahmed/Neil Khatu 3-25-7

Third Round: Sekhar Challa/Derek D'Souza Lost to Moaz Shaikh/Atul Kharecha 11-25-8 >>Abdul Qadeer/David Gonsalves Beat Neil Khatu/Romulus DaSilva 20-12-8 >>Sylvester D'Souza/Manuel Coelho Lost to Umair Kamal/Wajahat Mohammed 13-25-7

Shad Ahmed/Nayeem Rahman Lost to Ravi Shankar/Atul Bhav 0-25-5 >>Balachandran Dandapani/Nahdi Hussain Lost to Madhu Rao/Vishal Karangutkar 7-25-7

Fourth Round: Abdul Qadeer/Derek D'Souza Beat Umair Kamal/Romulus DaSilva 24-15-8 >>Moaz Shaikh/Nayeem Rahman Lost to Madhu Rao/Neil Khatu 4-25-6 >>Sekhar Challa/Manuel Coelho Lost to Vishal Karangutkar/Shad Ahmed 4-25-7 >>Ravi Shankar/Nahdi Hussain Lost to Atul Bhav/Atul Kharecha 9-25-7 >>Sylvester D'Souza/David Gonsalves Lost to Balachandran Dandapani/Wajahat Mohammed 1-25-5

Fifth Round: Abdul Qadeer/Nayeem Rahman Lost to Wajahat Mohammed/Romulus DaSilva 11-25-7 >>Madhu Rao/Manuel Coelho Beat Shad Ahmed/Sylvester D'Souza 25-0-4 >>Vishal Karangutkar/Nahdi Hussain Lost to Atul Kharecha/Umair Kamal 9-18-8 >>Atul Bhav/David Gonsalves Lost to Neil Khatu/Ravi Shankar 1-25-7 >>Balachandran Dandapani/Derek D'Souza Lost to Moaz Shaikh/Sekhar Challa 2-25-6

TEST - Day One

New Jersey 3

Carrom Canada 1

New Jersey Sweep Doubles

Moaz and Francis lose a thriller

The first ever test series for the **D'Costa Financial Group Trophy** started with the doubles event.

Francis and Moaz, the Canadian No. 1 pair, taking on US No. 1 Sekhar and Neil. The first game was well contested until the 4th board, with the score 6-5 in Francis and Moaz's favor. In the next 4 boards, Francis and Moaz ran away with the game winning 19-11.

The 2nd game and the match, was also in the bag for the Canadians, with Francis and Moaz leading 22-11 in the 6th board. With Moaz to break in the 7th there was little chance of a major set-back. But the unexpected happened! Neil showed his class capitalizing on Moaz's unexpected miss, by a timely 7 coin pocket in the very first chance of play and put the Canadians on the defensive and winning the board by 6 points.

Now the target to win the game for the US side was 6 points and with Neil having the break this target was very much within reach. Neil once again came to his side's rescue and produced a whopper of a break in the last board by pocketing 7 coins and blocking Francis completely and laying down a finish to his team mate Sekhar. Despite Francis's tremendous defensive play, he could not stop Sekhar setting up Neil for a finish. The US pair made an amazing comeback and won the game 22-22 and tied the match at 1 game apiece.



Presidents, Hasmukh Patel (US) and Francis D'Costa (Canada) with the coveted trophy.

Moaz, the most promising player in the Canadian side, played an excellent game but was candid in admitting that this was the most tense game of his career, playing alongside opponents and partner of such high caliber. He also commended his partner's stress free counter attacks and innovative defensive plays.

The 3rd game started well with Francis and Moaz leading 9-0, but then the cookies crumbled and the US pair strolled through, winning the game comfortably 25-9.

The second pair had Manuel Coelho and Wajahat Mohamed playing against the experienced veteran duo of Atul Kharecha and Madhu Rao. They lost to their formidable opponents 13-25 and 11-17.

The US team strategically moved down their No. 1, Vishal to the 3rd pair to play with Atul Bhawe against a steady Canadian pair of Umair Kamal and Derrick Silveira and this move did pay dividends. They beat Umair and Derrick, 24-9 and 22-11.

Qadeer and Shad wins One for Canada

The consolation win for the Canadian side came in the fourth pairing, Abdul Qadeer and Shad Ahmed proved that practice pays off and their upteen practice games consolidated their ideas in team play. They both played an excellent match to beat Ravi Shankar and Abdul Khader 25-7, 5-21 and 18-16.

At the end of day one, the New Jersey side went 3-1 up. The Canadians were rather unfortunate not to share the spoils at 2 matches apiece.



Sitting L to R: Nayeem Rahman, Francis D'Costa, Atul Kharecha, Sekhar Challa, Vishal Karangutkar and Neil Khatu.

Standing L to R: Abdul Qadeer, Balachandran Dandapani, Abdul Khader, Manchu Kanaga, Moaz Shaikh, Ravi Shankar, Atul Bhawe, Madhu Rao, Derrick Silveira, Umair Kamal and Manuel Coelho.

TEST - Day Two

New Jersey 8

Carrom Canada 4



General Secretaries, Moaz Shaikh (Canada) and Atul Bhawe (US) with the trophy.

New Jersey Sweep Doubles

Vishal shuts off Francis

The singles event started on Sunday, with NJ No.1 Vishal taking on his Canadian counterpart Francis. With Francis beating Vishal in the US National and Vishal defeating Francis in the World Cup this match promised a lot of fireworks. However, it was not to be. With Francis down with flu, he had no counter punch to Vishal's safe offensive play. Francis, who was to be replaced by Shad Ahmed, lost the match 7-25, 13-22.

Slam by Umair but Sekhar wins

The new find on the Canadian team, Umair Kamal, who played NJ No. 2 Sekhar, had the only white slam of the tournament. Umair, playing his first international match with a highly experienced Sekhar, led the second game 20-1 in the 5th board, but could not capitalize on the lead and lost to an experienced Sekhar 20-23 after losing the first game 7-23. Umair was gifted \$61 by the US secretary Atul Bhawe for his white slam. Umair will certainly take this experience as a learning opportunity and be an asset to the Canadian team.

Derrick loses with a fight

Derrick Silveira, who due to work commitment did not participate in the computerized doubles, played his heart out against Madhu Rao (5) winning the second game 19-14, after losing the first narrowly 19-25. The 3rd game went to former US champion 2-21.

Moaz cruises comfortably

The game between the secretaries ended with the Canadian Moaz Shaikh overcoming his formidable opponent Atul Bhawe, who practices in Ontario, in two games, 13-12 and 23-7.

Manuel given a scare

Manuel Coelho a higher ranked Canadian was strategically placed to play the NJ (8), Markham based Manchu Kanaga, a former US resident and work permit holder. Manuel who won the singles at the New Town Square open, was given a run by Manchu who led Manuel 12-5 in the 7th board. However, Manuel's experience came to his aid as he overpowered his lesser ranked opponent 15-12 and 25-1.

Wajahat taken to distance

Wajahat who played NJ (7) and another former US champion Ravi Shankar also had a tough match to handle and scraped through winning both games 22-18 and 18-16.

Balachandran's unfortunate loss

Cool and calm, Balachandran Dandapani, a fairly new addition to the Canadian carrom family, played an amazing match and was unfortunate to lose to the veteran Atul Kharecha and (4) 13-18 and 15-19.

Neil's classy display

In the last singles encounter, Abdul Qadeer fought his way against 3 times World Cup participant Neil Khatu losing 12-25 and 8-23.

The New Jersey side picked up 5 of the 8 singles matches and won the test series 8-4.



A rewarding visit ...

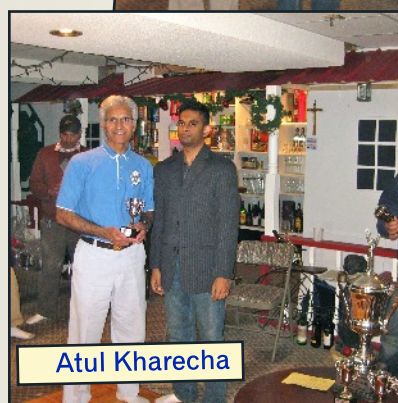
Hasmukh Patel, a prominent businessman and the US carrom president made time from his busy schedule to be present on the first day to inaugurate the first ever series.

Atul Kharecha, an important member of the US carrom organization and a successful businessman said that he was delighted by the shape the game of carrom is taking in North America and gave much credit to Carrom Canada for its incredible effort in promoting the game. The top players, Vishal, Neil, Sekhar and Bhav were very impressed with the computerized doubles concept and are in full support of implementing the idea in the USA. Francis D'Costa, president of Carrom Canada, informed the players that the association will be sending invitations to other US states, Maryland, Virginia, California and Texas to participate in a similar test series in the near future. He added that plans are also being discussed to stage a test series between North America and Europe. Invitations will also be sent to powerhouse India and the enthusiastic Oceanic Group comprising Malaysia and the Maldives.

Sinclair D'Costa of D'Costa Financial Group, the sponsors of the event, gave away the prizes. The tournament was also supported by Shad Ahmed, Moaz Shaikh, Bridget D'Costa and Sylvester D'Souza through their voluntary contribution towards food and refreshments.



The winners...





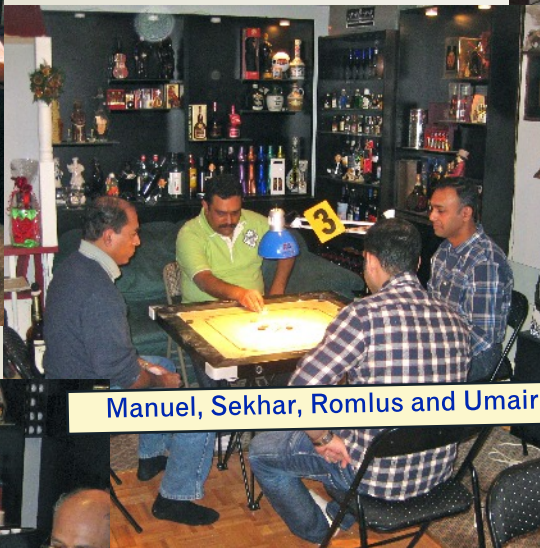
Atul, David Gonsalves, Balachandran and Moaz



Shad, Derek D'Souza and Neil



Sinclair and Francis



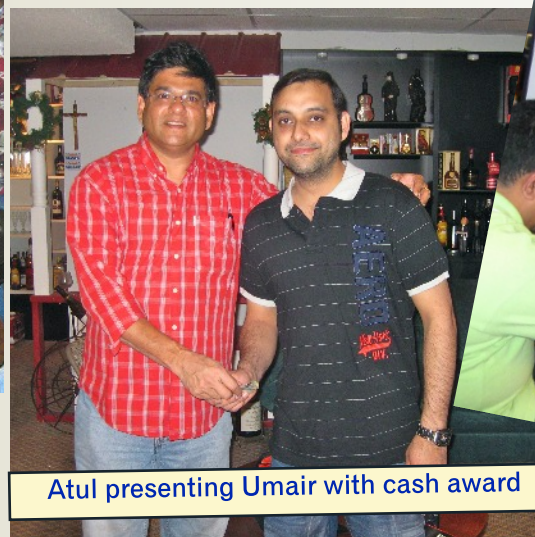
Manuel, Sekhar, Romlus and Umair



Sekhar with the trophy



Qadeer, Wajahat, Spectator & Madhu



Atul presenting Umair with cash award



Sekhar, Romlus and Umair