

## East Coast Challenge 2021 - 20th Anniversary Tournament

**2,532 bowls needed to crown champion**



2021 East Coast Challenge participants in Pinehurst: SED in yellow and NED in blue.

U.S. players from the Northeast and Southeast divisions of Bowls USA celebrated twenty years of a competitive but friendly rivalry at the annual East Coast Challenge in Pinehurst, North Carolina. Every October the two teams vie for the coveted title of champion of the eastern U.S. seaboard. This year 2,532 bowls had to be played before the winning team could be determined on a close measure in the last end of the final game, a finish befitting the 20th anniversary of the Challenge. In the end Southeast eked out a victory by a team score of 37-35 for its 11th win in the tournament's history.

Players traveled as far as 600 miles from New York, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and New Jersey to play against rivals from Florida and North Carolina. The Challenge's popularity among players is demonstrated by seven Northeast players who have competed at least ten times. But the rising star this year was 14-year old Brianna Duffy, a New York native playing triples and fours alongside her father, Patrick Duffy. Patrick himself began bowls at a young age and soon became one of the top bowlers in the U.S. Gauged by her play at the Challenge, Brianna is on track for similar success.



Brianna and Patrick Duffy

The tournament began as the brainchild of Burl and Barb Roller of Clearwater Florida who called their friends Jack Lucey, Bill Farrell and Colin Smith in the Northeast, who supported the idea and together came up with a plan and format that endures. Although this year was the 20th anniversary of the Challenge, hurricanes and Covid-19 have caused cancellations on three occasions.

Teams consist of 15 bowlers of mixed gender from each division, divided into three groups of five who play pairs and triples on day one against the opposing three squads, and three games of fours and singles on day two. Teams are awarded two points for a win and one point each for a tie. Much like golf's Ryder Cup, teams chase a point total to secure the title with the magic number of 36.5 team points needed for the win. In case of a tie at 36 points each, the previous year's champion -- in this case Northeast -- retains the trophy. This scoring quirk will loom large at the end of the tournament.

Speaking of golf, the Challenge takes place on the bowling green inside the circle drive in front of Pinehurst No. 2, the famed championship golf course, host to three U.S. Open golf championships, U.S. Women's Open, and U.S. Amateur championship. The Challenge's 20th anniversary banquet was held on the veranda overlooking the 1st tee and 18th green. During the weekend, golfers stopped to observe this strange-looking game. Bowlers were gracious to entertain questions and even show off the asymmetrical bowl to golfers' puzzlement and admiration for the skill the game requires.

In the 20th anniversary edition of the Challenge, Southeast stormed out to a big lead in pairs and triples, leading 23-13 after day one. Fortunes reversed on day two as Northeast closed the gap to 31-29 after two sessions in fours and singles, meaning it would all come down to the last three matches in fours and singles with 12 points available. Southeast singles players held serve winning two of three matches, but Northeast fours teams took care of business in two games. Only one hotly contested fours game remained to determine the champion.

In the deciding game, Southeast scratched out a five point lead, but Northeast closed the gap to within two with one end to play. The Northeast front end dominated and held three shots when the skips took to the mat. Skip Maurice LaFond knew he needed just two shots for a tie that would allow Northeast to retain the trophy. With his first bowl, Maurice added a cushion bowl to lie four. Local Southeast skip, Dan Delgarn, looked to break up the head but sailed wide with his drive. Maurice countered with a blocker on his last bowl but it was slightly off-center. Dan had no choice but to drive again, and this time his bowl struck the head scattering bowls across the rink. After the clatter of bowls settled, Northeast clearly had one shot but a measure remained for the deciding second. The umpire was called who went back and forth measuring several times between two bowls 18 inches from the jack. A final determination by 1/16 of an

inch favored Southeast for the win at 11-10. By a close measure after 2,532 bowls played Southeast held on to win the tournament 37-35.

Bowlers come to compete and to claim the trophy for their division, but the heart of the Challenge has always been about renewing relationships and enjoying the camaraderie and gentle banter experienced among friends. Part of the fun is a \$25 wager each player puts into the winner-take-all pot, not to mention the privilege of hoisting the trophy for a photo op in front of your competitor-friends. The 20th anniversary of the East Coast Challenge was not only memorable but its success ensured its future for years to come.

In the tournament's history 43,044 bowls have been played.



Pinehurst lawn bowling green in front of Pinehurst Country Club and Golf Course No. 2

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-photos courtesy of Bob Nilsen