

Finals Reported and Written by Lialah and Simone

Lobban VS. Lake

The MAA was packed on the fifth and final day of the Open De Montréal 2024, where in the final there was a head-to-head between Greg Lobban from Scotland and Nathan Lake from England. This is not their first time meeting in a final, in fact, this is their fifth. Lobban has had a more successful track record, beating Lake three out of four times.

During the first game, the Scotsman looked quite comfortable and in control of the game, but Lake fought back hard, tying the game up 7-7. There were a couple of errors from Lake and a couple of nice holds by Lobban, giving him the advantage in the latter half of the game. Lobban stayed steady during the game, going up 10-8, and ultimately taking the first game. Lobban did a great job of taking the opportunity in the available corner as it opened up, putting Lake under pressure.

In game two, we saw great retrieval from both players. Lobban and Lake had some fairly long rallies, but Lobban managed to squeeze out the points by taking it in short at the right time. Yvon Provençal (Squash Canada National Team Coach and organiser of the tournament) remarked that Lobban's style of taking the ball in short quickly was rewarding on these courts. As Provençal suggested this gave Lobban the upper hand as he was able to take the second game with more ease winning 11-5.

In the final game of the tournament, we saw more of a fight from Lake, as in some of the longer rallies he was able to gain control and force the Scot into more errors. Lake as the underdog had some clear crowd support, with many applause and celebrations as he held and sent Lobban the wrong way during the game. Lobban was still able to hold onto the game, with some effective boast then volley patterns putting Lake under lots of pressure. These patterns were dangerous for Lake as Lobban was able to put the Englishman under lots of pressure until he was forced into an error. The final rally of the match is long and anticipating, which has the crowd on the edge of their seats. Lobban is able to persevere, Lake ultimately makes the first error. Lobban takes the championship 11-8 in the third game, defeating the final Englishman and winning his first pro tournament in Montreal.

Semi Final Matches Report, Written by Lialah Mavani

Match 1: Greg Lobban (SCO) vs Tom Walsh (ENG)

The first semi-final match between the first seed, Greg Lobban, and the third seed, Tom Walsh. This match-up had the MAA packed and buzzing with excitement, as both players had smoothly gotten through their previous opponents in three games. In the first game, the beginning started with both players making a couple of errors, trying to find their game. The game was filled with some long rallies, putting work into

both player's legs. However, Lobban did have a few errors at crucial points, at 7-7, giving Walsh the precious lead. Walsh capitalised on this lead taking the game 11-7.

In the second game, there was a shift in momentum, with Walsh making the first couple of errors. There were some heated calls, and the crowd erupted in laughter as Walsh had already started to give his explanation to the referee before a decision was made, with the ref responding "I didn't say anything yet." There were too many unforced errors from the Englishman, as he felt a pressure to attack quickly. Lobban was able to extend the rallies and play more patiently than in the first game, ultimately allowing him to take the second.

In the third game, Lobban was able to continue his momentum from the second. The rallies were extended by Lobban, leading to a couple of unforced errors, widening the score gap between Walsh and Lobban. Lobban went up 10-6 with a game ball, but Walsh was ultimately able to save three game balls, unfortunately not enough to stop the Scot from taking the third game.

In the fourth and final game of this semi-final, Lobban and Walsh had some crazy long rallies, really testing each of the player's attrition and endurance. Lobban was able to control the game with great lines, leaving Walsh scrambling around the court. However, Walsh did have some spectacular rallies himself, he stretched Lobban from front to back, extending the pressure, and Lobban ultimately fell to Walsh's control. Lobban regained the momentum towards the end of the game, where it was clear Walsh was feeling the pressure. Lobban gives the crowd an exciting end to the match, hitting a beautiful rolling cross-court nick. Lobban takes the 62-minute battle of attrition 11-6 in the fourth game, defeating yet another Englishman.

Match Two: Nathan Lake (ENG) vs Sanjay Jeeva (MYS)

The last semi-final at the MAA was the most anticipated one of the night. The match included the final Englishman and second seed, Nathan Lake, who matched up against the young and unseeded Malaysian, Sanjay Jeeva. The crowd was eager to see if Jeeva would perform to the same level he did the previous day when he took out hometown favourite David Baillargeon. Questions were in the air if Jeeva would crack under the pressure of this being his biggest result in a 20K tournament or if he would rise to the occasion and carry on his momentum from the previous matches.

The first match of another all-out lefty battle started with Lake smoothly taking the lead, up 9-3. However, later on in the game Lake gets caught on a couple of strokes as Jeeva starts to grasp control of the rallies a bit more than he did in the first half of the game. Lake prevails taking the game 11-6.

In the second game, Lake took even more control, forcing Jeeva to make many errors. Jeeva seemed to have a nervous presence as he was playing, it felt as though we were watching a different player from the one we saw in the quarter-finals. The Englishman was doing a great job of pushing Jeeva to the back of the court and then waiting to attack. Lake took this game with dominance, winning 11-1.

In the third and final game, Jeeva gets on the court still looking a little rattled. The young Malaysian loses the first four rallies off of errors, proving the utter control from Lake. Jeeva starts to crawl his way back into the game hitting a couple of amazing attacks, particularly his iconic reverse boast which seemed to be successful in his previous matches. With a couple of errors by Jeeva, Lake regains control of the game. Lake takes the lead and follows through with it in the latter half of the game winning the match 11-4.

Quarter Final Matches Reported and Written by Lialah Mavani and Simone Visram

Match 1 - T. Mekhalfi (6) VS. T. Walsh (4) - (3 - 0 for Walsh)

The MAA is buzzing tonight as the bleachers were full of eager spectators and expectant sponsors. The night begins with an entertaining but tense match between the Frenchman, Toufik Mekhalfi, seated sixth, and Tom Walsh, seated fourth. This is not their first time meeting on the squash circuit. The last time they played Mekhalfi came out on top after a five-gamer, making this a proper grudge match for Walsh. During the first few rallies both players appeared vigilant and eagled-eyed. They began by primarily playing length, and fighting for control of the T. After a while, Walsh ran away with quite a few points due to Mekhalfi making various unforced errors. In the end Walsh took the lead in the match, 1 - 0.

Between the first and second game it became known that Walsh was being coached by Jeremias Azaña, another player who was knocked out during round two. Mekhalfi was being coached by Macéo Levy, who was knocked out in the first round. After the 90 second break, Walsh continued to lay the pressure on Mekhalfi with his precise shots and calm demeanour. While there were a few complaints about blocking, and questionable calls from the ref, Mekhalfi appeared to be more focused as he hit some clean backhand length, and was able to push the game to a win-by-two situation. This did not deter Walsh as he was able to secure the second game with a score of 12 - 10, even as Mekhalfi went flying and diving for the ball.

In the third and final game, there were some exceptional rallies which showcased the determination of both players. Mekhalfi hit some great shots including a standout volley-drop off a serve which hovered perfectly over the tin, and moved at a speed which Walsh wasn't able to counter. However, while there were some beautiful shots played there were still several unforced errors on Mekhalfi's part. Due to this, he came across unfocused and overwhelmed. This fueled Tom Walsh as he charged ahead, gaining vindication and a spot in the semi-finals.

Match 2 - Greg Lobban (1) VS. Emyr Evans (7) - (3 - 0 for Lobban)

In a comical turn of events on the MAA squash courts, the players of this match sported opposite coloured shirts to their home-country flags, reminiscent of high-stakes rugby games. Both from across the Atlantic, Greg Lobban (1), from Scotland, and Emyr Evans (7), from Wales, met up for a thrilling quarter finals match. During the first game, Lobban secured an early lead and was more in control of the games' pace. While there were moments when Evans was able to return the pressure, Lobban regained momentum and caused Evans to make errors. As the first game continued, long rallies unfolded, but many times resulted in a let ball. Those in the audience remarked it felt as though there was a let ball for almost every rally. To add to the entertaining nature of the game, Evans broke his strings and had to retrieve a fresh racket. Towards the end of the first game, the tensions were already high as Lobban became a bit pushy, but successfully took the first game, 11- 7.

As the second game began, both players seemed as tenacious as ever. Continuing their trend of rallies that seem to last forever, the first one was no different. Lobban's spectacular boast was one of his most effective shots, displacing Evans' movement. Evans countered Lobban's efforts with some stand-out shots of his own, namely his kills. Tension built as the game progressed and both players expressed irritation with the referee. An example; Greg Lobban made an out-of-this-world get, which led Evans to argue it was "three bounces." While Evans' fought hard, Lobban continued his streak and took the second game 11 - 7.

As we headed into the third game, the first rally gave the audience a laugh when Evans' slipped and collided with Lobban, and asked for a let, which was not granted. From the beginning of the third game, Lobban took his space and blocked his opponent, effectively putting pressure on Evans. As the play raged on, Lobban gained momentum, but Evans' was quick to follow. However, due to some unforced errors, a trip, and a nick in the backhand front corner, Lobban won the final game, the match, and a spot in the semi-finals.

Match 3 - David Baillargeon (3) VS. Sanjay Jeeva (3 - 0 for Jeeva)

The third match of the night was one of the most attended matches of this tournament thus far. The hometown favourite, David Baillargeon (3), and Sanjay Jeeva faced off in a clash of the ages, lefty edition. Jeeva came onto the court warmed up and ready to go, and quickly secured a solid three-point lead. Baillargeon tried to lure Jeeva into a game of hard-hitting and fast balls, but Jeeva avoided the temptation and countered with a variety of slower shots, lobs, and holds. Throughout

the next few rallies both players fought for control, but Jeeva, utilising some cheeky attacking shots, ended the first game 11-9 in his favour.

Coming back into the second game, Jeeva was not deterred by the cheers of the local crowd for Baillargeon. David seemed a bit eager in some of the longer rallies to take the ball in short. This was challenging against a player as speedy as Jeeva, since he was able to swiftly retrieve his shots. Often Baillargeon was first to make the error, giving Jeeva a slight advantage. Jeeva pushed through the second game, taking it 11-9 with a crowd pleasing shot, a cheeky reverse boast.

The third and final game had the crowd on edge, with many cheering for their hometown favourite to comeback. Jeeva continued to vary the pace, the third game consisted of some long and drawn out rallies which kept the crowd on their toes. Jeeva prevailed and pulled out an upset three game win against the Canadian favourite, taking the last game 11-7 and officially knocking the third seat out of the tournament.

Match 4: Nathan Lake (2) VS. Finnlay Withington (3 - 0 for Lake)

The last match of the night and the crowd was filled with anticipation and excitement after the previous upset. The matchup included number two seed Nathan Lake from England against another fellow Englishman, Finnlay Withington. Withington is up and coming on the circuit only having recently finished juniors. Stepping into the first game, Lake had some great height variation in his length. Though both players were trying to find their games, often making some errors. Withington had youth on his side, quite speedy and forcing Lake from corner to corner. Withington went up 8 - 5, but ended up falling to Lake 12 - 10, his experience taking a hold in the last couple of points.

The second game Lake seemed a little stressed going onto court, but ultimately Withington's errors gave Lake an advantage. Lake took the second game 11 - 4. However, the third game is where Withington started to step his game up a bit. Withington's short game and crazy hands gave him the advantage in the third. Withington took some control of the game and went up 10 - 5, however, Lake was able to hold off the speedy Englishman saving four match balls. Withington prevailed in the third game after an unfortunate error from Lake after playing through contact.

In the last and final game of the night, the excitement between the two players continued. Withington proves to be a little eager in his attacks, making some mistakes and giving Lake the advantage. An exciting dive from Withington at 6 - 9 down, he falls slightly short giving Lake a match ball. Lake takes the match 11 - 7 in the fourth game.

Round 2 Matches (Court 1) Reported and Written by Simone Visram

Match 1 - Greg Lobban VS. Tomo Endo (3 - 0 for Lobban)

The second night of the Montréal Open was an absolute treat. The night started with a showdown between Greg Lobban (1) from Scotland, and Tomo Endo from Japan. During the first game, Endo was able to secure a solid head start leading 5 - 0 as the Scotsman warmed up and assessed Endo's style of play. Soon enough, Lobban took control of the T and the game. He showed that when he gains momentum, he is a force to be reckoned with. Lobban was able to take the first game thanks to his crisp and decisive shots (no matter the type).

During the second game, Lobban didn't falter, instead, he ramped up the pressure by volleying anything he could. Endo was able to keep up with the pace set by Lobban and had some exceptional volley drops, but after a while, he became more frenzied leading to some unforced errors. In the third and final game, Endo seemed to have returned to court with a little more pep in his step, and during the first rallies, he appeared sharp and eagle-eyed. However, he quickly became overwhelmed by Lobban's persisting pressure, which was generated by the Scots' control of the T and his ability to move Endo around the court incessantly. Greg Lobban was essentially able to tire Tomo Endo out to secure the win for not only his first match of the 2024 Montréal Open, but his first match in Montréal ever.

Match 2 - David Baillargeon VS. Joseph White (3 - 0 for Baillargeon)

During the round one matches of this PSA Challenger, Australia's Joseph White was coached through a five-game match by none other than, David Baillargeon (3), the favourite of the hometown crowd. However, the same dynamic was not present today, as White and Baillargeon went head to head during round two.

Game one started with David to serve, which is dangerous because when he steps out on the court he owns it and makes sure he's the one calling the shots. Baillargeon set the pace with hard-hitting, speedy, low drives to counter the height advantage of his opponent. Throughout the first game, White attempted to match the pace, and seemingly out-hit the Canadian which proved unsuccessful as the first game ended in a score of 11 - 1 (for Baillargeon).

Throughout the second game, David continued with the heavy-hitting pace and Joseph continued to respond with equal strength, not changing his approach from the previous game. The Canadian's domination of the T allowed him to be more conservative with his movement and aided him in moving the Aussie around, which often led to an unforced error on White's part. During the third and final game, tensions were high and spectators were on the edge of their seats. Ultimately, Baillargeon was able to secure the win and a spot in the quarter-finals with the help of a particular shot, the cross-court kill, as well as an abundance of shots that died in the nicks of the court (approximately more than five times during the entire match).

Match 3 - Nathan Lake (2) VS Ondrej Vorlíček (3 - 0 for Lake)

Nathan Lake (2) from England and Ondrej Vorlíček from the Czech Republic had a lively match during the second evening of the Montréal Open. The night before the young Czech player had taken down the twelfth seat of the tournament which added to the intrigue of his second match of the tournament. During the first game, Lake dominated with a wild 9 - 0 lead. This can be attributed to his tactical knowledge of the game and his ability to anticipate Vorlíček movements based on the combination of previous shots made.

During the second game, Lake prevailed with his sharp style, which had shaken Vorlíček up in the first game and continued to do so in the second. While there were consistent rallies, the Englishman was able to pick the perfect moment to go for the kill or for the classic drop, which were both deadly. Furthermore, as the second game continued and led into the third, it was noticeable that Vorlíček was starting to try any winners, rather than lead his opponent to commit an unforced error. However, due to Lake's control of the T, it proved to be difficult. In the end, Nathan Lake pulled through and won, moving himself into the next stage of the tournament, the quarter-finals.

Round 2 Match (Court 2) Reported and Written by Austin Cooper Report

Match 4 - Jeremias Azaña VS Sanjay Jeeva (3 - 1 for Jeeva)

A match of supreme athleticism, grit, and controversy, this has to be one of the most entertaining and enthralling spectacles of the night. Both players displayed explosive forms of play and were able to put together complex shot combinations that kept their opponent running from corner to corner. Roars echoed through the facility, coming from each of the players once they prevailed

through a critical point, of which there were many. The momentum ebbed and flowed throughout the entire session.

Several of the games had Jeeva and Azana trading points, especially in the third game where both were within one point of another for its entire duration. The third game seemed to be a crucial one where the crowd was constantly in suspense as the players were consistently having rallies consisting of over 30 shots. Though, the game had to end somehow, and it ended in utmost controversy with a stroke being gifted to Jeeva, allowing him to win 11 - 9. This crucial turn in game three left Azana to look slightly tentative with his movement, grimacing to show his clear intent to remove himself from Jeeva's line to the ball. Who knows if this influenced the games to follow; he did have a very strong will coming into the fourth game with heroic efforts to volley Jeeva's shots, rewarding him with a comfortable 7 - 3 lead. Jeeva then showed absolute determination through his highly intentional play and ability to change the pace of the points. No matter the score, Jeeva looked calm and collected. It was, in the end, Jeeva prevailing, with his finishing shot being a deadly low reverse boast; one of many that was used throughout the match. This seems to be a rivalry in the making and a match-up that you'll be sure to want to watch when it happens next.

Round 1 Matches - Reported and Written by Lialah Mavani

Match 1: Tomo Endo (JPN) vs Macéo Levy (FRN)

The first match of the tournament at the MAA started off with a thrilling five-setter match of the young Frenchman and crowd favourite, Macéo Levy, and Tomo Endo, who recently returned back to the tour from a serious running injury. Before the match started, tournament organizer and Canadian National Team Coach, Yvon Provençal, remarked that "this will be the best match of the night." Provençal was indeed correct.

The first game started strong with Endo dominating the court. Levy seemed to start slow in the first game, going down 11-5. However, Levy came back, still falling short and losing the second game 13-11. The second game was filled with some exciting dives from Endo, he finished the last point with a questionable stroke ball. It seems Levy stepped it up in game three and Endo started to slow down. Levy dominated the third game with a decisive win and continued the same momentum into the fourth.

The fifth and final game was a nail-biter. The first couple of points went back and forth, Levy took the lead, but Endo didn't give up and pulled out a gritty win in five. He finished the match on a cheeky boast, winning 11-9 in the fifth.

Speaking to Endo after his match, he says this is his first PSA match back in Canada since the pandemic when he stopped playing due to the lockdown in Japan. Endo had an incredible battle against Levy, after returning from an injury in October of 2022 where he broke five bones.

Incredible battle overall!

Match 2: Joseph White (AUS) vs Mohamed Nabil (EGY)

White and Nabil's match was another entertaining five-setter. The Australian (who shares the same name and racquet as the McGill Men's Co-Captain, Joseph White) was being coached by home-town favourite David Baillargeon. White was matched up against the talented Egyptian, Nabil, who has recently been training in New York.

As Nabil served the first point of the match, he and his opponent Joseph White went on to have an impressive first rally which showcased both their endurance and stamina. After that first rally, we knew this would be an entertaining match. The first game started with some long rallies, but there was a tense tone on court. Nabil took the first game, which finished on a dramatic and contested stroke against White.

In the second and third games, the match started to get a bit more heated. There was some more than-needed physical contact between the two players, showing their intensity and spirited nature. White was up 10-7 in the second and Nabil had a dramatic tumble winning the point, 8-10. However, White prevails, taking the second game 11-7. White took the third game but wasn't able to continue his momentum through to the fourth where Nabil took the match to five games. In the fifth game, there was a tense atmosphere, with more blocking coming from Nabil and a couple of arguments with the referee. All of this aside, White was able to regain momentum and pull off the win in five.

Match 3: Cory McCartney (CAN) vs Sanjay Jeeva (MYS)

Cory McCartney, Canadian favourite and wildcard, had a match-up against the Malaysian-Lefty, Sanjay Jeeva in the first round, an unexpected matchup considering McCartney was on reserve, and wasn't supposed to play the tournament until a couple of days ago when other players had to pull out. No matter the last-minute performance, McCartney had a solid match against Jeeva.

In the first and second games, Jeeva had decisive wins against McCartney. Jeeva was in constant control of the first two games, he built the pressure against McCartney forcing McCartney into some errors. Jeeva wasn't able to keep this momentum going in the third game and tended to force some errors in the front court. McCartney prevailed in the third game, taking it 11-7.

McCartney started off the fourth with some deadly kills and great retrieving. However, Jeeva was able to regain control of the match, and had some great fakes, with Jeeva ending off the game 11-6 on a deadly nick.

Match 4: Christopher Gordon (USA) vs Ondrej Vorlíček (Czech)

This match was another five-game thriller, with the familiar American player, Gordon, matching up against the Czech, Vorlíček. Gordon went out strong in the first couple of rallies, dominating the game with clean lines. Vorlíček was having trouble gaining control of the rally and had a hard time against Gordon's retrieval. There were some close games in the second and third, going back and forth between Vorlíček and Gordon, but ultimately Gordon went up 2-1 in the fourth game.

In the fourth and fifth games, Vorlíček stepped up his game, dominating Gordon on the court. Gordon started to make more errors, fell short of a couple of balls, and his legs began to slow down. Vorlíček jumped on this opportunity, he powered through these final games, staying in control, and decisively taking the match in five.

Vorlíček was ecstatic after his big win against Gordon, he remarked that he has been training a lot in the last couple of months. He said that it has been hard to fully consider himself a professional player, as he is a full-time student, studying in Prague.