

Wisniewski wins ninth PB open singles crown

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

At an age when many athletes are hanging it up, Mike Wisniewski still is playing with the big boys in paddleball.

Wisniewski, 52, of Bay City, Mich., won his ninth National Paddleball Association open singles title on March 28, 2010, at the Sorrento Valley Racquet & Fitness Center in San Diego.

He defeated Mike Orr of San Diego, 21-17, 21-15, in the final of the indoor, four-wall championships.

Wisniewski has posted a magnificent record over the years, appearing in 16 NPA national singles finals and winning nine. But the last seven years have not been very fruitful, Whiz having lost in the final in 2005 and 2009 and not getting there the other five years.

Wisniewski said he has spent the last seven years "looking for the right formula to withstand the 'West Coast Offense.'"

It was in 2003 that players from the Paddleball Nation, a group of paddleballers from the West Coast, began appearing in NPA tournaments. And winning with regularity.

"The WCO combines an aggressive approach to the game mixed with a high level of athleticism and awesome shot-making ability that had dominated (four-wall) paddleball the last seven years," Wisniewski said.

"I have been on a mission since then to regain a National Singles title. I needed to unlearn some old methods and gain new ones to have any hopes of competing with the West Coast style of play."

Orr, 36, who won the 2009 NPA national open doubles championship with Todd Entrikin, also of San Diego, gave Wisniewski a run for his money in the final.

"In the first game, it was all serve and shoot by Orr and myself," said Wisniewski. "He has one of the smoothest backhands ever and can produce offense from anywhere in the court."

Neither player could gain a commanding lead and Wisniewski, trailing 17-16, scored five unanswered points to win the first game.

"The second game was an all-out battle of kills, pass shots and retrievals from the players," Wisniewski said. "I was thrilled to be able to make gets that I haven't made since the '90s. It was just a great day for me and I took advantage of that."

He said that with the score tied at 15 "I used a 3-wall Z-serve to score the next three points and then mixed up a few more unorthodox shots to come out on top, 21-15. WOW, what a win!"

Wisniewski had an even tougher semifinal match. Playing Kevin Williams, the 2008 open runnerup, Whiz won the first game, 21-17. Williams took the second, 21-18.

Said Wisniewski: "The third game was the thriller. After some experimentation with different shots and serves, I suddenly found myself behind, 13-1. It was time to go to work. I focused on defensive retrievals and (got) Kevin's kill shots in front court.

"Somehow I was moving to the ball better than I had in a decade. I was able to hold and finish with a miraculous 21-16 win. Charlie Brumfield later stated it was one of the best come-from-behind rallies he had ever witnessed. Now that's a compliment!"

From 1989 to 1999, Wisniewski played in 10 of 11 national singles finals and won seven of them. He also has won three NPA national open doubles championships.

In second on the all-time national championship singles win list is Steve Keeley with five.

Next year will mark the 50th season of indoor, four-wall paddleball tournaments.