

NPA

(INDOOR / FOUR-WALL)

National Paddleball Association

WWW.PADDLEBALL.ORG

NPA, 7642 Kingston, Portage, Mich. 49002

NEWSLETTER / WINTER 2009-2010



This court player increases his chances for a game wherever he is. See Page 4.

PB greatness doesn't come easy for Mike

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

When great paddleball players are mentioned, the name of Mike Czabala rarely comes up. And I wonder why.

Over the last 16 years, Czabala has played in 12 of 14 NPA National Doubles Tournament finals which indicates something about his skill and his consistency.

The fact that he has won only two of them is a little disheartening but consider that he and his partners have faced the best paddleball teams ever in those contests.

And of course, as in any outstanding effort, we have to remember that the journey is just as important as the goal.



Mike Czabala

Czabala, 33, a transplanted Michigan resident, also has been in four National Singles finals since 1998.

And his batting average in those is zero. But if you list his foes in those matches, you can

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2009-2010

NPA Schedule

MIDWEST SINGLES:

Adrian, Mich., YMCA, Jan. 15, 16, 17, 2010.

MIDWEST DOUBLES: Old IM Building,

U. of M., Ann Arbor, Mich., Feb. 19, 20, 21, 2010.

NATIONAL SINGLES:

Sorrento Valley Fitness Center, San Diego, March 26, 27, 28, 2010

NATIONAL DOUBLES:

Forest View Racquet Club, Arlington Hgts., Ill., April 16, 17, 18, 2010.

Have you hugged your paddle today?



The amazing Al Storey was feted by paddleballers at a luncheon. Page 3.

MIKE

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understand why -- Mike Wisniewski in 1998, Andy Mitchell in 2000, Chris Crowther in 2006 and Kelly Gelhaus in 2007.

So basically, Czabala of Camarillo, Calif., and formerly of Auburn, Mich., has been facing the best of the best when it comes to paddleball.

Why are Mike's national records not better, aside from the fact that in doubles you have to rely on a partner?

"You had to bring that one up," Czabala said. "I think you hit the nail on the head that it had to do with the competition. Although there are a few I think I could have had. There are a couple that haunt me. The biggest one being the loss to Mitchell in 2000."

He lost to Mitchell, 21-20, in a tiebreaker.

Many outstanding players have played in no championship finals, or just a few, in their many years in the sport. Czabala has played in 16 national finals! That's amazing.

Czabala and Wisniewski won the national doubles championship in 1998 over Jim Owens and Mark Piechowiak, 21-16, 18-21, 21-3.

But Czabala's biggest victory came when he and Whiz teamed up to win the national doubles crown in 2002 over the best team in NPA history, Mitchell and Andy Kasalo, 10-21, 21-13, 21-13.

It was one of only three finals losses by the Andys in a remarkable career that saw them win 20 national doubles titles. The next best total by a team is four by Dick Jury and R. P. Valenciano. Gelhaus was won four but with two different partners.

Czabala is no slouch, which is obvious because along with Wisniewski, he has teamed up with Bob Groya, Randy Hoyle, Bob Sterken and Crowther in the other finals.

Generally, Czabala has been on the right side in those finals and he's one of the premier players there. He's one of those guys who seems to get everything. He's tough to score on. Although he does his share of putting up points.

Czabala, who is an official of Disney-ABC-ESPN Television, is quick and a good shooter, both requisites of players at that level.

He has studied the game and said he began playing paddleball as a 5-year-old in the basement of his parents' home in Auburn, near Midland, Mich.

"I used to spend hours ... playing made-up tournaments with just about everyone I knew from watching at tournaments or got to know," Czabala said in an E-mail. "And I had some



Czabala (left) and Wisniewski celebrate after their big win over the Andys in 2002.

interesting matchups. Who knows I might have had you beating Marty Hogan at some point and I would have 64-team draws.

"Anyway, the space I played in at a front, back and left wall was no more than 20 by 10 and I would see how many times in a row I could hit the ball without it bouncing or skipping ... Literally, I was probably 5 to 10 feet from the wall most of the time."

How much did he learn from his father, Frank, a very good player?

"Just about everything in the early years," said Czabala. "He was the only person I played with and most of the credit should go to him. But I also give a ton of credit to all the guys from Midland who would play doubles with my dad and I when I was 9 or 10 and pretty much a novice. Learned a ton from them and they all helped me grow."

Who's the best PB player he's ever seen?
"Tough one," Czabala said. "But I will go with Marty Hogan. I was too young to know everything that was going on with the game at that time but when I saw him in '87 in Ann Arbor and watched him dominate guys that I saw as the best, I was amazed."

But he adds that Andy Mitchell is the best doubles player.

"Hands down," said Czabala. "Smart, fiery, determined and always can find a way to win. You replay those doubles matches against him and Kasalo on a weekly basis, it would be quite a thrill. Those were the best matches and something I wish everyone could experience."

Czabala said he's quite busy with work and his family -- wife Tammy and stepchildren Zhirelle (8) and Kiera (6) and a baby girl due this month -- and also does not have anyone to play with consistently. So he hasn't been playing much.

By the way, Czabala in those other two national doubles tournaments where he did not reach the final -- he and his partners finished third.

Not a bad record overall for a guy whose name seems to escape paddleballers when great players are mentioned.

Storey singled out by PBallers

Al Storey was recognized recently by the Ann Arbor, Mich., paddleballers for his contributions to the sport and to their well-being.

A luncheon was held on Oct. 10, 2009, at the Real Seafood Restaurant in that city.

Storey, 88, of Ann Arbor, was gracious as always and said a lot of nice things about PB.

"Paddleball is a unique sport," he said. "Paddleball is made up of unique individuals who like to compete, develop skills and enjoy what they are doing.

"They're also a different breed. When we first had tournaments, we always had referees. But in a few years, we understood we didn't need referees -- that the people who play paddleball play it fair and sportsmanlike.

"We are a different group of people. The only reason I'm still playing is because you allow me to play

with you. What I'm saying is, we who are in paddleball -- I just think it's a family relationship."

Storey continued: "And when we come together in the IM building or in Grand Rapids or Bay City and Lansing, it's been just a tremendous thing to see people again, people who you talk to personally, you got to know, people who get to know you -- and play this sport for what it's meant to be."

Several in attendance talked about Storey's influence on their life even outside of paddleball. He often was referred to as a mentor.

Storey, the former director of the University of Michigan extension service, began playing PB in the late 1940s but not in earnest until 1978.

He has won six national golden masters singles titles and two national golden masters doubles championships.

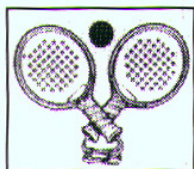
-- LOU GIAMPETRONI



Storey with a plaque presented to him.



Tom Porter with a T-shirt given attendees.



Rod Grambeau (in the white shirt) offers a PB story.



Some smart aleck presented Storey with a bag of 200 golf balls.

This player always can find a game

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Are you a court player and can't get a game?

Do what Duane Costanzo does. Play three of the major court sports -- handball, paddleball and racquetball and, as he says, it "guarantees a game wherever you are."

Costanzo, 56, of Lapeer, Mich., knows his way around a court -- many of them. He started playing handball and paddleball in 1971 (the latter on a one-wall court at the Pontiac, Mich., YMCA).

He played both about 10 years and then began playing racquetball. Then, back to handball in the late 1990s and paddleball in the early 2000s. Racquetball has been an off-and-on endeavor.

But he has excelled in all three sports, winning championships in each of them.

In handball, he took a Men's C singles title in 2004 in Dallas, Texas, and a Men's B first in doubles in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2007. He also finished second, with Charlie Doyle, in their division based on total age of the team, in the Milwaukee Classic in December 2009. Costanzo and Doyle play out of the Flint, Mich., YMCA.

Costanzo's firsts in paddleball came in Men's C in the 2004 National Singles in Ann Arbor, Mich., and a state Men's C singles title in Jackson, Mich., in 2004.

In 1996, he captured a racquetball title by winning the State Singles Men's C division. He also has won league championships at various levels.

Costanzo, who is self-employed, also has many seconds and thirds in various tournaments.

What's the most difficult of the three sports for the left-hander?

"Learning to play handball is more difficult," said Costanzo. "Once you understand the ball movement, it's very easy."

Which sport does he like best?

"Handball will always be my favorite," Costanzo said. "Not to take anything away from paddleball. Just a personal choice."

He usually plays handball two or three times a week at the Flint YMCA, and occasionally gets in a game of paddleball there.

Costanzo said he analyzes his opponents when he goes into the court.

"The people I play against in handball and paddleball can pose a challenge sometimes," he said. "First impressions can be deceiving. Everyone is enjoyable to play with and against, once you know their personality."

Costanzo said he has played "handball, paddleball and racquetball through the years, depending on what was available. I plan to continue playing as long as my body allows me to. I am fortunate not to have had any injuries to date."

Any thoughts about getting involved with the fourth major court sport -- squash?

"No," said Costanzo. "I tried it once and didn't care for that at all."

He is sold on the benefits of all court sports and said he "would like to see more young people getting into some variation of court sport. Expose them at a young age and they will play forever."

Costanzo said he enjoys "playing all three sports ... all are fun, challenging and strategically unique."



Costanzo with a paddle ...



... with a handball.



... with a racquet.

DeGreif, Carmona nab title

By O.J.Cunningham

The 41st Turkey Paddleball Tournament was held Saturday (Nov. 21, 2009) at the Bay Area Family Y in Bay City, Mich.

This year, 14 players had their names drawn out of a hat to determine partners. The last two standing were Sandy DeGreif and Scott Carmona, both of Bay City. They defeated Joe Siniff and Scott Wittbrodt, Bay City, in the final -- 16-21, 21-9, 21-13.

The consolation winners were Saginaw, Mich., brothers Jim and Andrew Price. They defeated Greg Keenan, Bay City, and Nate Kauffman, Saginaw, 17-21, 21-20, 21-10.

DeGreif and Carmona got frozen turkeys along with the trophies. The winners donated their turkeys to the Samaritan Mission.

The turkeys were donated by Ricker's Green Hut. Nancy Powers was the tournament director.

DeGreif now holds the record for the most years between wins at the annual Turkey Tournament. DeGreif last won in 1986 -- 23 years ago. Carmona last won a Turkey title in 1988 -- 21 years ago.

(Proving once again, that old paddleball players just don't know when to quit.)

DeGreif won in 1986 with Bob Estabrook and Carmona in 1988 with Randy Wackerle.

Lefty Siniff just missed being the oldest Turkey Tournament champion (ever) at 72.



Photo by Thomas Mendel



Don Kirkconnell (in action and at left) was the 2009 honoree at the Pig Roast & Human Sacrifice. The event, held annually, offers a little paddleball and a lot of partying. Going strong for more than 30 years, it recognizes a player who has contributed much to the great sport of PB. And it goes without saying that Don has done just that, especially in the last few years.



Martin

PB -- Better with age

Paddleballer Nancy Martin of La Jolla, Calif., sent along this E-mail on Nov. 20, 2009:

"I turned seventy last Wednesday, which is hard to believe because I had a game at noon, and my partner is 26 years old.

"But there you are. Life keeps going, but paddleballs stay the same, even if the paddles keep changing.

"I had to write on that big birthday since the age number didn't compute with how I feel internally or my motivation on the court.

"I wanted to send my reflections to you since there are just a few people in this world who share the same shoes and probably the same thoughts.

"You're one of them.

"Hope you are well and send my love to Al (Storey). May the game of Paddles keep us forever young."

Nancy is a former racquetball player who switched to paddleball and periodically visits her son Nathan (also a PBaller) in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Martin has been playing paddleball for about seven years after playing racquetball since 1973.

She said she found a bigger challenge in paddleball, saying that "Here was a sport that required more brains than brawn."

-- LOU GIAMPETRONI



Karl Briggs sports a shirt given to contestants.



A foursome plays a match in one of the three glass-backwall courts.

Paddleball players enjoy, enjoy

By NATALIE GILBERT

Saginaw, Mich. -- Paddleball is fun -- and the second annual YMCA of Saginaw Fun Doubles Tourney was just that -- a lot of fun.

The Michigan tournament on October 24, 2009, drew 22 players from Delta College, Bay City, Flint, Ann Arbor and Saginaw.

Winners of the A division were Jim Owens and Eugene Rush, in a round-robin group of five teams. Second place went to Sandy DeGreif and Tim Hilke.

Tops in the B division of six teams were Jim Price and Jody Henning. Second were Jeff Kalinowski and Bruce Gluski. These teams played in a double-elimination format.

Most of the players entered singly and then were paired with others who had done the same.

Last year's winners were Chad Krager and Andrew Price in the A division and Jim Price and Steve Witzke in the B division.

The winners received stitched-embroidery hand towels. All players received a T-shirt, wrist sweat bands and paddleballs.



Connor Kalinowski (left), 7, and his sister, Riley, 10, got in some early practice.

Wackerle will miss current season

Randy Wackerle, a many-time paddleball champion and director of one of the NPA's best junior programs, is out for the season.

Wackerle, of Bay City, Mich., has had knee surgery and will not be able to play during the 2009-2010 season.

In an E-mail, Wackerle, 61, said: "44 years of paddleball, two pedal bike crashes and a fall down a flight of stairs did a pretty good number on my left knee. It has been bothering me for two paddleball seasons now."

He said the knee has had two



Wackerle

scopes and the latest in September "was more extensive and they did a fracture technique. Drilled many holes in my femur above the knee to generate new growth where it is bone on bone. I have a 70% chance this will work. I won't know for four months if this is a success."

The doctor gave him permission to ride a stationary bike 20 minutes a day.

"No golf, no paddleball ... what else is there?" Wackerle wrote. "I am driving 20 to 30 hours a week teaching Driver Education in Saginaw and Bay City. Life goes on ... hope to play again sometime."

"Kind of scary when you think about not playing, but boy, am I getting the honey-do list taken care of."

It's more than a game

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Anyone who has played paddleball for an extended period of time will tell you basically the same thing: They don't talk about wins or losses; they talk about the people involved and how much they enjoy them.

Players cite the sportsmanship, the kindnesses and the general all-around niceness of the people.

Oh sure, all players like to win. But I'm sure many continue to play because of the aforementioned reasons. Most of us realize there are only a few winners.

I had asked Dave Haehnle, a player from the Jackson, Mich., area, to write some comments on his early experiences in the sport.

Haehnle and Gordy Hatt of Jackson were instrumental more than 20 years ago in forging a deal with Penn Athletic to provide paddleballs for our game. Haehnle no longer works in the operation because it does not need more than one person, Hatt said.

I didn't realize I had made my request of Haehnle many years ago. He sent along an E-mail in October 2009.

Here it is:

"My experience never to be forgotten.

"It's getting harder to remember the good ole days when I first started playing paddleball. But here we are twenty some years later. I can't play because of my knees but I still come to the tournaments to watch the matches and root on the many friends I have come to know over the years by being involved in paddleball.

"The first tournament I entered was in Kalamazoo and I played in the novice division. I have always loved competition and was a week-end warrior. I ran into a lot of people just like myself and was struck by the great sportsmanship and camaraderie of all the people at the tournament.

"Needless to say, I got whacked by everyone I played but I

contracted the bug that I think inflicts everyone that has come to love the game.

"At that time, all of the divisions had many players and it not only took good play to advance but an unbelievable amount of conditioning and mental toughness. (You might play 5-6 matches to get to Sunday.)

"So I started to run three to four times a week, lift weights and play paddleball up to six times a week. It took a long time to get in condition and improve my game to just move up in the divisions I entered at that time.

"I remember one tournament early on that stands out during those times in the 1980s when there were huge turnouts to play.

"The tournament was at the Old IM Building in Ann Arbor. I was in the novice division and made it to the finals and played Dmitri Remsberg, a really nice young kid with a great future ahead of him, and he had to play this old guy.

"We had a great crowd watching and they were rooting for every point. No one really watched the novices at that time so I was so nervous that I had to hide my hands in front of me so that no one could see them shaking before I dropped the ball to serve it.

"Our match was very long and went to the tiebreaker and I won



Dmitri Remsberg

by one point (lucky shot). I know it was a heart-breaker for Dmitri and I was happy just to survive and second place would have been fine with me. I was hoping that he might help me off the court since he had hardly broken any sweat and I was absolutely spent.

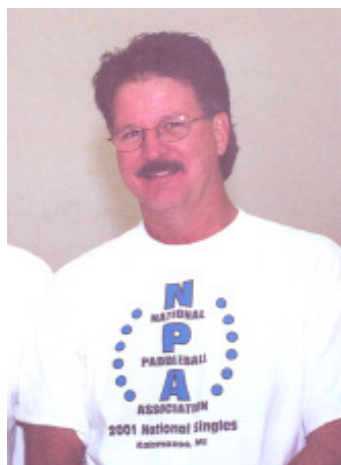
"He and his parents (great parents and paddleball players) and the crowd were so generous to me that it has stuck with me ever since. I know you take no prisoners in this game, but I will always regret the outcome of that game.

"Dmitri, his parents and that match were very special. Not that I won but how gracious they were in losing and how this game can teach everyone the lesson that winning is not always that important but how you play the game.

"I did have my successes over the years which I don't even think I could remember if I didn't have some hardware on my office wall. But I will never forget the Remsbergs, and their tragic loss. The losses never bothered me after that. Sporting game losses seem pretty small when you keep your eye on the big picture, don't they?"

(Editor's Note: Dmitri Remsberg, 16, son of John and Linda Remsberg, was injured fatally on December 20, 1984, in an auto accident near Ann Arbor, Mich.)

(The NPA established a trophy in Dmitri's memory to go to a young player who exhibits both skills and sportsmanship in the sport of four-wall paddleball.)



Dave Haehnle
A 2001 photo

Paddleballs

... can be ordered through Spectrum Sports, 2618 South St. Anthony, Jackson, Mich., 49203 or by calling Gordy Hatt at (517) 784-1861.



Pappas

PADDLEBALL PROFILE

Andy Pappas used paddleball to get healthy.

Pappas, 53, of Westland, Mich., said he began playing PB in 1994.

"I just needed to get in shape after I quit smoking," said Pappas, a retired ironworker.

What does he enjoy about the game?

"I just love the challenge of getting better," he said. "I really enjoy the tournaments and the people."

Pappas said he won a national Men's C singles title "and lots of seconds and thirds."

Any suggestions on improvement of tournaments?

"Lorri does a fantastic job," Pappas said. "No complaints. We just need new players."

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