

# NPA

(INDOOR / FOUR-WALL)

**National Paddleball Association**

WWW.PADDLEBALL.ORG

NPA, 7642 Kingston, Portage, Mich. 49002

NEWSLETTER / WINTER 2010-2011

## NPA FACING BALL PROBLEM

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Well, it finally happened.

The day I have always dreaded finally arrived.

Over the years, I have always pushed for paddleballers to buy balls. That's because I always had the feeling that some day, down the road, there wouldn't be any more balls.

And of course, no more sport of paddleball.

Well, that day arrived and Penn Athletics/HEAD said it would discontinue manufacture of the P-100 paddleball and concentrate on its core products -- tennis balls and racquetballs.

Efforts are being made to have a company manufacture a ball so the great sport will continue.

The Paddle Company has been working since the announcement to try and find someone that will manufacture the ball. The NPA is looking into any and all possibilities.



In the mid-1970s, during a Mideast oil embargo, the black paddleball was nowhere to be found. So the National Paddleball Association nosed around and tried just about everything to get balls.

I was in New York, at Columbia University for a conference about that time, and went

**See BALL PROBLEM, Page 2**



**WHO IS THIS GUY? IF YOU KNOW THE ANSWER, YOU'VE BEEN AROUND PADDLEBALL A LONG TIME. SEE PAGE 6 FOR DETAILS.**



**PADDLEBALLERS EVERYWHERE OWE A DEBT TO THE LATE TOM BALLANTYNE (ABOVE), WHO PROBABLY DID AS MUCH AS ANYONE IN STRENGTHENING THE N.P.A. -- SEE PAGE 5.**

**NPA TOURNEY SCHEDULE, Page 5**

# BALL PROBLEM

Continued from Page 1

into a department store and bought four-dozen Hi-Bounce balls. The clerk said that kids used them for stickball on the streets and for bouncing off porch stoops. They were about the size of the P-100.

Hi-Bounce was an appropriate name for the items because they bounced almost to the ceiling in the court. I dyed black a few of the balls, which were pink, and drilled a hole in them. It took away a lot of the bounce but they still got up a little higher than desired.

One day my son, Mike, was in a court at the Flint, Mich., YMCA and playing with someone and I asked where he got the ball. He said he got it from our basement where I had been working on them. He said they weren't the greatest but they were usable.

Shortly thereafter, the oil embargo ended and paddleballs were produced again.

It's been a fantastic 30-some years, with paddleball exploding over that period since then. But here we are again.

Lorri Brigham, NPA secretary-treasurer, said the organization has enough paddleballs to get through the 2010-2011 season.

"You may want to be cautious with the paddleballs that you have," Brigham said in an E-mail to players. "The NPA will be sticking by their one ball per player/team for tournaments.

"While the NPA does not feel there is any reason to panic, please let your fellow players know of this turn of events. Together, we might be able to find a solution to our problem."

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There have been other "paddleballs" on the market. However, they are not paddleballs as we know them. Sometimes they're more like handballs or squash balls, solid through and through.

That would be tough playing our game with those.

But there was a proposal by the late Bob Kendler, a Chicago businessman who was the guru of handball and racquetball, who once suggested that we play our game with paddles and handballs!

Can you imagine!!

He spoke at a meeting of the National Paddleball Association at the 1973 national tournament in Eau Claire, Wis., when we were having ball trouble then too.

"Did you know that there are a lot of paddleball players who will use only a handball?" Kendler said. "I tried it once and had a GREAT game!"

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Paddleball great Steve Keeley had suggested the NPA play "a hybrid game" -- paddles using a racquetball.

He wrote an article that appeared in the 2003-2004 NPA newsletter and said "if there's any future to paddleball, i think it's with the faster ball." He added that he personally preferred "black ball (the P-100) paddleball, but don't think it's even a ripple of the future."

## Dr. Bud got PBallers into the racquets

Dr. Bud Muehleisen was responsible for leading West Coast paddleballers into the other court sport of racquetball more than 40 years ago.

That's the contention of Charlie Brumfield of San Diego, a national paddleball champion and long-time No. 1 racquetball player in the country.

He told the story in a 2004 interview at the National Paddleball Association National Singles Tournament at the One-On-One Club in Ann Arbor, Mich., where he was an entrant. Brumfield led a group of West Coast players back to paddleball in 2004.

Muehleisen was a two-time national singles paddleball champion and also had won two national doubles titles. He and Brumfield also were still playing paddleball, Brumfield said, when they entered the first national racquetball tournament in St. Louis in 1969.

"There were 128 people in the draw," said Brumfield. "Everyone was talking about it; it was more like gang busters. They were talking how to improve their table tennis racquet into a decent racquet."

Muehleisen developed "an edge with a racquet where he could hit the ball hard enough with the racquet strings to where he could shorten the rally," Brumfield said. "He could take the ball and drive it by the younger players and still maintain the touch to stretch the court.

"When he saw the entry of racquetball into the game and so much excitement, we got to talking about it. But I think he made the conscious decision to take the flock, as it were, on the West Coast into racquetball. So we started playing racquetball in lieu of paddleball in 1969 directly after the national racquetball tournament.

"And basically the paddleball play in San Diego followed his lead, which is: he wanted to play racquetball, and we played racquetball from thereon. It was almost a complete reversal overnight."

# Let up a little bit -- if you can

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Have you ever been in a match where it is very obvious that you are going to win and -- to keep your opponent's enthusiasm for the game -- you let up just a little bit?

In other words, you let up a little and let the opponent do a little better than he or she ordinarily would.

I've often wondered about that.

I think about that especially when some players give away a lot of years -- in some cases, 20 years -- in their match against some better players.

I remember when the late Barry Lucas and I were in some tournaments in the masters division. The golden masters occasionally did not have enough entries so they were put in masters, a lower -- and younger -- division.

The older players never asked for any special consideration. Like all PBallers, they loved the game and did the best they could.

I don't know whether I did it intentionally but I just wouldn't play as hard as I was capable. I just admired the fact they agreed to play in the stronger division (stronger in the sense that they were quite a bit older).

And I especially remember once when a Bay City, Mich., golden masters team played a tough match against us until we pulled it out, 21-18, 21-20, or some such score. But it was close.

I can still see the golden masters players smiling and exulting over how well they played and how they almost beat the "kids."

Lucas always would get upset with me and had some choice words when the scores were quite close.

"You did it again, didn't you, you little \$%&@#!@#&\$," would be the nicest thing he said.

Barry was not of the same opinion -- obviously.

I pointed out to him that we never, that's never, lost such a match over the years.

I have always encouraged others to play paddleball, primarily because of the people you meet. And I want them to play again and again.

If they get destroyed in a match, chances are they might not be back -- figuring the sport is too tough. But if a little mercy is displayed by the conqueror, the loser might be encouraged to come back. Especially if he or she had fun.

Years ago, in a tournament at the Flint, Mich., YMCA, I was assigning players to various courts. I called out the names of one of PB's best-ever and his opponent. About 10-15 minutes later, I saw the better player and mentioned that I had put his match in such and such a court.

He smiled and said: "It's over. I won, 21-1, 21-0," or something like that.

I thought at the time he is not a very good ambassador for paddleball. I venture to say the loser packed up his paddle and shoes and probably never came back to the sport.

I've always contended that "Nice doesn't cost anything." and that's one of the reasons many players continue to play

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## Midwest Singles Results

Jan. 22-23, 2011, Bronson Athletic Club, Kalamazoo, Michigan

**OPEN:** 1st, Don Kirkconnell; 2nd, Chad Krager.

**MEN'S A:** 1st, Chad Schwall; 2nd, Jeremy Wheaton.

**MEN'S B:** 1st, Greg Keenan; 2nd, Ted Wray; 3rd, Terry Kennedy.  
Consolation: Ted Ruble.

**MEN'S C:** 1st, Jim Price; 2nd, Todd Krager; 3rd, Nathan Kaufman.  
Consolation: Natalie Gilbert.

**MASTERS:** 1st, Andy Mitchell; 2nd, Sonny Salazard.

**GOLDEN MASTERS:** 1st, Jared Arnold; 2nd, Bill Farmer.

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paddleball for years. As a matter of fact, I believe many entrants realize their chances of victory are fairly slim but they have a good time at tournaments. As a matter of fact, if I had gotten into the sport only to win, I would have had to quit a long time ago.

Along that same line, I'm glad the NPA Board of Managers broke each of the age divisions into an A and B group. In other words, the better players in "golden masters A" and the lesser players -- those who lose in the first round -- in "golden masters B," with a champion in each group.

We are getting fewer entrants in the age divisions because the great players now are eligible for some of them -- while still good enough to compete in the OPEN DIVISION!!

I watched Andy Mitchell and Mike Wisniewski in the Midwest Doubles a year ago at the Old IM Building at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. They were playing in the golden masters division. They weren't toying with their opponents but they weren't playing very hard and won in a breeze.

Not all paddleball players are created equal. Keep that in mind the next time you are heavily favored to win a match. No one is making a living at the great sport of paddleball.

Maybe I'm wrong but that's how I feel.





**A classic T-shirt for a memorable occasion.**



**Mark Smith, a longtime player and supporter of the great game, came from his home in Wausau, Wis., to play in the tournament. He and Andy Mitchell took second in the Golden Masters division for players at least 55.**



**NPA Secretary-Treasurer Lorri Brigham was on hand as usual, making sure everything was in order. The first tournament of the season was renamed in her honor for her many contributions over the years to paddleball.**

**BRIGHAM CLASSIC RESULTS (Dec. 4-5, 2010 -- Delta College)**

**OPEN:** 1st, Chad Krager-Brandon Creamer in round-robin competition.

**MEN'S A:** 1st, Chad Krager-Don Kirkconnell; 2nd, Ron Malecki-Brandon Creamer; 3rd, Greg Keenan-Scott Wittbrodt.

**MEN'S B:** 1st, Al Harris-Kyle Alexander; 2nd, Sam Holtz-Rick Clewis.

**MEN'S C:** 1st, Jim Price-Rick Kogelman; 2nd, Don Traxler-Keith Thurlow.

**MASTERS:** 1st, Andy Mitchell-Bob Berg; 2nd, Scott Lawrence-Jim Swendris.

**GOLDEN MASTERS:** 1st, Sandy DeGreif-Ron Malecki; 2nd, Andy Mitchell-Mark Smith.



# Ballantyne: A key to paddleball's success

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

There have been many persons over the years who have poured tremendous energy and efforts into the success of indoor, four-wall paddleball.

But none more than the late Tom Ballantyne, who was almost a one-man gang in his desire to make paddleball as we know it a vibrant and colorful sport.

Ballantyne, who died in 2003 at the age of 78, was one of the key figures in the 1974 reorganization of the National Paddleball Association and the man responsible for much of its success for more than a decade.

It was Ballantyne who took the shaky operation of the NPA which was 12 years old at the time and helped make it a strong group that put indoor, four-wall paddleball on the map.

He also made personal efforts to convince the Penn Athletic Co. to continue to produce the paddleball when it appeared it would be discontinued.

He was the architect of the plan for the NPA Board of Managers and was a member of the board in the mid-1970s. He was NPA president in 1974, 1975 and 1976.

Ballantyne, who was very competitive as a masters singles and doubles player, was the first recipient -- in 1976 -- of the Earl Risky Memorial Trophy.

It is awarded in honor of the founder of the great game of paddleball and given annually to



**Ballantyne**

the person who has contributed most to the sport.

Paddleball was Ballantyne's big love, along with golf. He put in countless hours to make paddleball the best it could be.

Of course, as we all know -- it was either Tom's way or the highway. He definitely had his opinions. And he liked to give little lessons.

On one occasion, we were in a large classroom at the University of Michigan working to set up a tournament. He asked me why I had done something or other, and I said: "I just assumed it would be O.K."

He picked up a piece of chalk, walked to a blackboard and said: "Let me show you something."

And he went on to print A-S-S-U-M-E in large letters. Then he divided the word with two slashes -- one before the U and one after the U.

"When you assume," he said, "you make an ASS out of U and ME."

I've never forgotten that. I don't do too much assuming anymore.

As I said earlier, Ballantyne was a very good player and knew the strategy of the game.

On one occasion in a house tournament at the Flint, Mich., YMCA, I was playing Tom in singles.

He won the first game, 21-17 or 21-18. I was seven years younger than Tom so I figured I would move the ball around in the second game and tire him out and thus force a third-game tiebreaker.

I took an 18-0 lead in the second game -- and never got another point. I had opportunities but my strategy backfired.

I gave the eulogy at Ballantyne's funeral and told the audience that paddleball requires a lot of running and exercise to help us keep in shape.

"But the best part," I said, "is that we old farts still have an opportunity to COMPETE against each other."

"There's that sense of going into battle even though it's a fun thing. How many people can recapture the glory of their younger years in the arena?"

"Well, paddleballers can still do that."

For all he did, paddleball players everywhere owe Tom a great debt.

	<b>WESTERN REGIONALS</b> -- Feb. 5, 2011, Sorrento Valley Fitness Center, San Diego, CA.
<b>N. P. A.</b>	<b>MIDWEST DOUBLES</b> -- Feb. 11-13, 2011, Michigan Athletic Club, E. Lansing, MI.
<b>2010-2011</b>	<b>NATIONAL SINGLES</b> -- March 18-20, 2011, Forest View Racquet Club, Arlington Heights, Illinois.
<b>SCHEDULE</b>	<b>NATIONAL DOUBLES</b> -- April 15-17, 2011, Sorrento Valley Fitness Center, San Diego.

**Have you hugged your paddle today?**



# Everyone wanted a piece of the champ

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

“Everyone wants a piece of my anatomy.”

That was the cleaned-up statement of Harold Branstner after he won the national masters singles championship of the National Paddleball Association in 1974 at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

He was commenting on the many players who then wanted to play a champion and challenged him whenever they could.

Branstner, who played out of the Flint, Mich., YMCA, was Flint’s first national paddleball champion.

He was 43 and masters players at that time had to be at least 40.

Branstner owned Branstner Construction Co., mason contractors, and described himself as a “fourth-generation bricklayer.”

When Branstner’s father, Fritz, 75, heard about his son winning the national title, he said: “Nice going, playboy. But you couldn’t win a bricklaying championship?”

Branstner, who was 80 on December 6, 2010, hasn’t played paddleball since the early 1980s when tough economic times led to the demise of his company.

Branstner has been a building inspector since 1990 for four townships in western Genesee County.

He plays a lot of blooper softball, especially when he’s in Florida.



THIS IS HAROLD BRANSTNER, FLINT’S FIRST NATIONAL PADDLEBALL ASSOCIATION CHAMPION (MASTERS) IN 1974. THE LARGER PHOTO ON THE FRONT PAGE WAS TAKEN IN THE MID-1970S AND THE OTHER IN MAY 2010. NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE, RIGHT?

“The reason I play third base is that I’m one of the few who can get the ball all the way to first on the fly,” he said.

“I feel the sports activity allows me to continue to play and stay healthy.”

While paddleball offered an opportunity for exercise and competition, there was another benefit.

“One of the big things was that I was an introvert,” said Branstner. “This (paddleball) helped me become a more outgoing person.

The camaraderie was absolutely outstanding. I was accepted by everyone. The competition was ferocious but the kindness was stronger.”

Does he miss paddleball?

“I always miss it,” he said. “Not only because of the physical activity but the camaraderie also.”

He got a strange reaction from his father with all the furor surrounding his success at winning the national championship.

“I thought he would be proud of me,” Branstner said. “I showed him the trophy. But my dad, who was born in Bavaria, didn’t go in for that.”

## Paddleball is the same as handball -- only different

On Jan. 13, 2011, John Sharpe -- an avid handball player at the Flint, Mich., YMCA -- made his paddleball debut.

He was subbing in a group of PBallers at the University of Michigan-Flint and I was his partner.

While he had played handball for a long time and had played racquetball on occasion, he never had played paddleball.

But he does know the strategy of court games so I figured he wouldn’t have too much trouble.

During a brief practice session before the four games we played, you could see that he knew what to do. It was just a matter of doing it.

He kept waiting for the ball to bounce off the back wall, the way a handball does. It doesn’t happen,



Sharpe

I told him. So it was just a matter of getting used to some different bounces and then returning the ball into play.

John and I played Lorne Minor and Walter Hancock, who by the way is 85 and a heck of a player.

Lorne and Walter won the first and third games and John and I won Games 2 and 4.

It took a while but John got his first PB point up the right side. Then he got a few more and he seemed to be getting into the swing of things.

But he still had problems getting the ball to the front wall.

Of course, so did the rest of us -- because no matter how long you play the court games, you don’t always hit a good shot. The idea is to keep the latter at a minimum.

John got a few more points and moved well. It will be interesting to see if he starts playing a little more PB. He’s welcome. We need everyone we can get. -- LOU GIAMPETRONI



# Ruble was the Man

By LORRI BRIGHAM

The 2010 Pig Roast & Human Sacrifice was held on June 5th and 34 people participated. We used a new format this time, having one division. As always, teams were picked from a blind draw.

They were then placed in round robins (3 groups of 4 / 1 group of 5). Every team played one game to 21 with the teams in their group. The 1<sup>st</sup> place teams from each group then formed the Open division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> place teams formed a "B" division. This formed a new round robin of 4 teams, which again played everyone 1 game to 21. That's a whole lot of play for a tourney going from 9 am to 3 pm.

We had some great match-ups from the blind draw. Matt Kollig who was recovering from a bum arm volunteered to drop out if we had an uneven number (always a possibility when you are doing a blind draw) ... Of course, then he saw he was matched with Dan McLaughlin and decided it might be fun to play after all.

The final Open draw was: Andy Mitchell/Eugene Rush, Matt Kollig/Dan McLaughlin, Bob Berg/Mark McClish, Jim Howland/Don Kirkconnell.

Matt made a good choice in staying in the tourney as the team of Kollig/McLaughlin won the Open division. Mitchell/Rush came in second.

Mens "B" Champions were Steve Haines & John Elsasser. The second place team in "B" was made up of Illinois players Martin Gonzales & Adrian Montes.

This was the third year in a row that Dan McLaughlin won the Roast (although he is the first to tell you that 3 years ago he got to the finals with Andy Mitchell, who then bowed out so that Dan could play in the finals with his son Kevin ... as Dan



**Pig Roast honoree Ruble discusses his PB skills.** was our honoree that year, it seemed only fitting).

Our honoree this time was Kalamazoo player Ted Ruble. Ted has played paddleball for over 25 years.

For quite a few years, he competed in tournaments with Dan Perrin and they always did quite well.

Ted has not traveled to tourneys in the last few years, but with his new-found fame of being a Pig Roast honoree, maybe we can get him to commit to a few tourneys this year.

Ted had no problem with the tradition of eating the pig's eye (helped along by the nice bottle of tequila that Bob Lapekas brought and shared).

Our "Woody" award winner was Sonny Salazar ... who has played in countless Pig Roasts over the years.

The 2010 Tourney was one of the few that we did not have great weather for ... in fact, by Roast time it was a series of downpours. That, however, is never going to stop (or even slow down) a paddleball player.

We all just huddled under the various tents and had a great time. Mother Nature was kind enough to not rain while we did our eye ball-eating ritual.

As always, it was a great tourney with wonderful friends. We even had a former paddleball player from Kazoo who had not played in 20 years show up to support his friends ... he said it felt like coming home. All in all, another great Roast.

**Paddleballs ...  
no longer can be  
ordered through  
Spectrum Sports.  
HEAD/Penn Athletics,  
which made the ball,  
has discontinued its  
manufacture, and is  
concentrating on its  
core products -- tennis  
balls and racquet balls.**



**Brad Ex**

## **PADDLEBALL PROFILE**

Brad Ex started playing paddleball in the mid-1970s “for fun and exercise.”

Ex, of Mattawan, Mich., said he then “hooked up with Mike Niven who introduced me to the NPA tournaments. I was sold on paddleball from then on.”

Ex, 61, a retired postal worker, said:

“The people who play this game have kept me involved year after year. They are the greatest.

“Many friendships have extended into areas outside of paddleball which is even more rewarding.”

Ex said his PB awards include a National C in 1983 and “back to back golden masters national in more recent years.”

Any suggestions on how tournaments can be improved?

“As long as we have Lorri running our tournaments, we couldn’t improve there.

“However, more -- and younger -- players would be nice.”

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