

NPA

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National Paddleball Association
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NPA, 7642 Kingston, Portage, Mich. 49002

NEWSLETTER / WINTER 2011-2012



Kelly Gelhaus (left) and Mike Wisniewski

PBall's 2nd quarter-century of tourneys saw rise of Whiz

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Another quarter-century of paddleball tournaments has passed us by and it's time to reflect on the sport's premier event -- the open division.

After the first 25 years, in 1986, the top open singles players were Steve Keeley, with five national open championships, and Steve Wilson, with four.

In doubles, Andy Mitchell and Andy Kasalo had won only four national titles as they started their magnificent career that would take them to 20 national championships.

The four doubles crowns were matched by Dick Jury and the late R. P. Valenciano. But that's as far as they got. Just the four, which represents the second most wins by the same team. Which illustrates how fantastic Mitchell-Kasalo was.

What has transpired in the last 25 years?

Well, the big name obviously has been The Whiz -- Mike Wisniewski, who has posted the best national singles record ever -- nine championships. Along with four national doubles titles.

Kelly Gelhaus and Andy Mitchell have

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New ball gets good marks from players

By CHAD KRAGER

Well, a huge success and thumbs up for the NEW Ektelon Paddleball.

The NPA's goal of having balls for the first tournament of the 2011-2012 season was met and the jury is already out.

Many people at the Brigham Classic in Midland, Mich., in early December found there was little difference.

Others thought there were slight differences, but they could easily make the necessary adjustments.

Overall, everyone had positive praise on the playability of the new ball.

Sales continue to flow in and the outlook is fair in being able to meet the financial commitment by the NPA to Ektelon on this initial order.

Please remember to place your order with the NPA directly for the most support to the NPA. Secondly, be sure that any other outlet is being supplied by the NPA.

If you cannot make it to NPA events throughout the year to purchase your

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NPA 2011-2012 SCHEDULE

Midwest Singles, Jan. 13-15, 2012, Lenawee YMCA, Adrian, Mich.

Midwest Doubles, Feb. 10-12, 2012, Forest View Racquet Club, Arlington Heights, Ill.

National Singles, March 16-18, 2012, Sorrento Valley Fitness Center, San Diego.

National Doubles, April 13-15, 2012, Michigan Athletic Club, E. Lansing, Mich.

WHIZ

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three national singles crowns each. Wilson and Mitchell are the only players to post three national victories in successive years.

Keeley was a classy, finesse player who could hit the power shot when he had to. His strategy was almost impeccable. He lost only two matches of significance -- a tough three-game loss to Marty Hogan in the latter's first appearance in an NPA event in the 1979 National Singles championship final and in the 1978 State of Michigan final in three games to Dick Jury.

In his career, Keeley affected some odd mannerisms in tournament play -- wearing different colored shoes, glasses without lenses, T-shirts with outlandish mottoes on them and a paddle -- the same one he used for years -- that wore itself to the bone, so to speak.

As the edges chipped on the dilapidated paddle, he would tape it or wrap shoe strings through the holes to serve as a cushion.

When he quit using it, Zelma, -- as Keeley affectionately called the piece -- looked like it had been through a couple of wars. Zelma now rests quietly in a large glass case at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor -- along with other paddleball memorabilia and photographs.

Steve Wilson? He dominated with his power. Wilson probably hit the ball harder -- all the time -- than anyone who has played the game. While others may have hit it as hard or harder occasionally, Wilson's style was to pound, pound, pound the ball until an opponent could not reach the ball or returned it weakly.

A few players from the early days of competitive paddleball believe Wilson would have had a more difficult time against a field of control players, which dominated the sport at that time.

But one thing was for sure when you played Wilson: you saw just about every inch of the court as you tried to run down his passing shots.

Wisniewski established himself as the dominant singles player in the 1990s.

In one stretch, he played in 13 of 15 national singles finals, winning eight -- from 1989 to 2005. He lost one in a tiebreaker -- 21-20.

He won his 9th national singles title in 2010, when he was 52.

Wisniewski is one of several open players who not only consider shots and angles that are almost unbelievable but they pull them off!

And the power is there for just about all of them. They hit the ball very hard.

Wisniewski also has won four national open doubles titles.

Whiz always is a tough opponent because he's difficult to read.

Many players display certain tendencies in certain situations. Whiz does not.

As a matter of fact, it sometimes appears that even he does not know what he is going to do in a certain situation.

He has power, finesse and speed and uses them all well. He likes to hit the long back-hand pinch or straight-in shot from the back wall.

All in all, he has been a formidable foe in the open divisions for two decades.

Kelly Gelhaus was in a position to win three national singles titles in a row in the mid-2000s but it was not meant to be. However, he did win three with a style that kept his opponents off-balance. They never quite knew whether it was going to be a power shot or one of amazing softness. His touch was astonishing.

Mitchell played singles but his forte was the doubles game and he has been described by most players as the best-ever in the latter. No argument there.

In the first 25-year period, two-time national singles champions were Charlie Brumfield, Paul Nelson, Dan McLaughlin and Dr. Bud Muehleisen.

The next 25 years saw Mark Kozub, Andy Kasalo, Marty Hogan and Cesar Carrillo each win two national singles titles.

All in all, it was another exciting quarter-century in the GREAT GAME!



Larry Piper, a longtime paddleballer, stopped by the Brigham Classic at the Midland, Mich., Community Center in early December.

Piper (above) has been out of the PB wars for nearly four years because of injuries and surgeries.

He said he still has hopes of suiting up again and returning to the courts.

A PB newcomer lets off some steam

(Editor's Note -- Pete Callstrom, 49, of San Diego, a former racquetballer, has been welcomed to the world of indoor, four-wall paddleball by Charlie Brumfield. Callstrom was invited by Brumfield to stop in for some PB on a Sunday drop-in session. That started it. Callstrom then offered this piece for the NPA newsletter.)

How come they don't just kill the damn thing? Why are they cutting off a ball you could take off the back wall and then pummel it -- yeesh? Lobs ... Lobs... Are these guys nuts!? Answers: Not yet, you don't understand, and yes.



Callstrom

A racquetballer back to the early 80's, I wasn't quite sure what to make of this growing group of grunting, lunging and obsessed woodies at my home club in Sorrento Valley, San Diego.

I was playing some racquetball, but only occasionally. So, one day, a

bearded and bespectacled friendly guy named Charlie said, why don't you come down on Sunday and give it a try.

Heard something about 'Paddleball Nation', beat-downs, and a very, very different game. Yeah, right, I'll show them. They're about to see some bullets, splats, and heat. Hmmmm, not so much.

I'm now learning the art of the ten-foot-high pass (yes, higher, dammit!), making my opponent do the 'chicken', and playing chess with a prehistoric hunk of composite dark matter. What!

Six months into it, haven't played RBall since, don't understand why this funky sport isn't bigger and can't wait for the next chance to inflict some real beat-down (ya gotta think big) on that Charlie Brum guy.

When not chasing down my two young daughters, another F\$%&ing lob and trying to OWN center court, I am the Director of the Regional Task Force on the Homeless in San Diego. I now play 3X a week and am looking forward to my first national singles tourney at my home club in March of 2012.

Look out, you uninitiated racquetballer snobs.

HORRORS! NO PADDLEBALL!

One of the most terrible things about serious illness and serious injury is that one probably can't play paddleball anymore.

George Hobbs, the 2011 honoree at the annual Pig Roast in the Kalamazoo, Mich., area, has experienced a little of both.



Hobbs

Hobbs had a hip replacement in 2002 "and that was the end of paddleball for me," he said. "What a great sport it was for me."

Hobbs, a former professor at Western Michigan University, said he has "lymphoma and battled it last winter. It came back and I will be fighting it again this winter!

"Only this time in Michigan.

This winter might include some stem cell treatments at the University of Michigan in April 2012."

Hobbs was a longtime player and many-time national PB champion. And he did it with different partners.

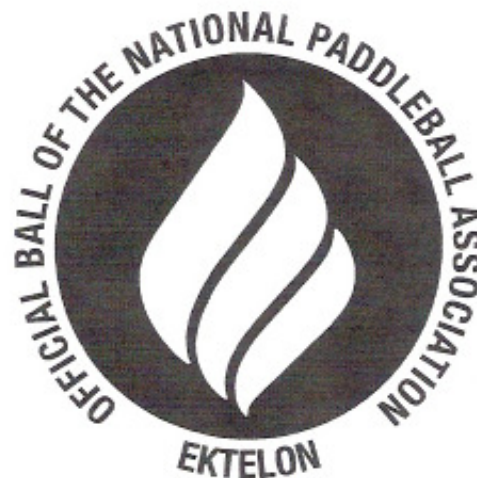
"My goal was to win and to win with different partners once I started playing doubles," he said.

Hobbs believes he had "a total around 12 national titles. I think Dan (McLaughlin) and I won the most titles together."

Hobbs said he started playing PB at Michigan State University "as a way to work on my hand/eye, fitness and overall quickness.

"Both of my coaches, Gale Mikles and Grady Penningter, were national singles champions so I didn't win very often. I didn't beat Gale ever!

"Grady used paddleball as a way to improve my wrestling. Both sports require endurance, quick decisions, moving your opponent around, and making him work." -- LOU GIAMPETRONI



Wackerle just keeps rolling along with another PB victory

By O. J. Cunningham

If you know anything about National Paddleball Player Randy Wackerle ... You know he's always looking for a game.

The 63-year-old Bay City lefty, and 2001 Bay County Sports Hall of Fame Inductee, just doesn't seem to be able to face the fact that Father Time might just be his final nemesis.

But not this year ...

Wackerle (with doubles partner Greg Keenan) found a "game" recently over at the Saginaw YMCA.

To hear Wackerle tell it, "I got my arm twisted into playing a paddleball tournament in Saginaw."

But the way it no doubt "actually came down" ... Wackerle teamed up with Bay City's Keenan and eleven games and a couple of days later, the Wackerle-Keenan duo was holding the top level division winner's trophy over in Saginaw.

This is Wackerle's 46th paddleball title.

"My most favorite thing to tell," says Wackerle, "is that I've won those titles with thirty-two different partners

"I actually thought my winning days might be over," Wackerle said about the tournament. "Cramps are affecting me now when I play for any extended period. My wife Jane says I'm crazy ... maybe so."

The championship match was against Bay City's Sandy DeGreif and Adrian's Sonny Salazar. Wackerle-Keenan outlasted DeGreif-Salazar in a hard-fought third game tie-breaker, 21-16.

"It's always sweet to beat DeGreif," Wackerle said, laughing. The DeGreif-Wackerle head-to-head list of battles is a long one.

In the B Division, four teams battled over the weekend in a round-robin format.

The finals resulted in Rick Kogelman and Steve Weir defeating Jody Henning and Jim Price in two straight games.

Brigham Classic Doubles results

(December 2-4, 2011, Midland, Mich. Community Center)

OPEN: Chad Krager-Andrew Price def. Brandon Creamer-Don Kirkconnell.

MEN'S A: Brandon Creamer-Ron Malecki def. Ed Maher-Don Kirkconnell.

MEN'S B: Al Harris-Kyle Alexander def. Eugene Rush-Ron Harris. Third: Sonny Salazar-Natalie Gilbert. Consolation: Rick Clewis-Fin Henk.

MEN'S C: Jim Price-Nathan Kaufman def. Chad Krager-Lanny Krager. Third: Jim Howland-Tom Paccione. Consolation: Marj Bolgos-Fin Henk.

MASTERS: Andy Mitchell-Greg Keenan def. Bob Sterken-Jim Swendris. Third: Sonny Salazar-Ed Maher.

GOLDEN MASTERS: Jim Sterken-Jim Swendris def. Andy Mitchell-Ted Ruble.

PLATINUM MASTERS: Don Kitson-Kerry Snow def. Don Traxler-Leon Serrine.



NEW BALL

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paddleballs, then please let us know your Health Club's name and purchasing agent to help us set up an account.

It is always nice to have a club stock paddleballs for your convenience.

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Bye-bye

They closed the doors at the Bay City, Mich., YMCA Saturday, December 17, 2011, and a bunch of the paddleballers bid farewell by playing a final game or two. The facility on Madison Avenue was built 57 years ago. The new Dow YMCA was set to open December 27. (See article on Page 7)

Not one of your better suggestions for a solution

Picture if you can a strong, young paddleballer using a paddle and playing with a handball.

Now it doesn't take much thought to realize that there's something very wrong there.

Yet, such a suggestion had been made when there was another ball problem in the mid-1970s.

It was 1973 at the National Paddleball Championships at the

Eau Claire, Wis., YMCA.

The speaker was the late Bob Kendler, a Midwest businessman and the guru of handball.

There was a move afoot to take paddleball into the handball fold.

There was a Mideast oil embargo and anything requiring oil products was hard to come by and paddleballs began drying up.

This was Kendler's suggestion:

"Perhaps we will have to offset the doom of paddleball with some innovations of our own. Did you know that there are a lot of players who will use only a handball?"

"I tried it once and had a GREAT time! You might pull a lot of handball players into your orbit with this idea."

Can you imagine!

A top open paddleballer hitting a handball with a paddle!

The ball could either go through the opponent or lodge somewhere in his body.

If you'll notice, no one ever took up Kendler's suggestion.



HI THERE. MY NAME IS LUCIANA GIAMPETRONI AND I'M LOU'S NEW GRANDDAUGHTER ... WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW IS, WHY IS MY GRANDPA RUNNING AROUND LIKE THAT CHASING THAT BALL ... AND WHY IS HE SO SHORT?

-- LOU GIAMPETRONI

The 1st women's PB champ has led a rather active life

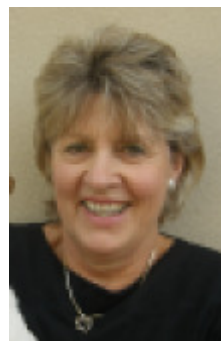
By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Most paddleballers who have been around for a while probably have heard about Caprice Behner, Carla Teare, Terry Smith, Anna Sue Thomas, Grace Louwsma and Judy Shirley.

They were the elite women players in NPA tournaments in the late 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s and won most of them.

But does anyone remember Kathy Williams?

She was indoor, four-wall paddleball's first national women's open singles champion - in 1974. The division had been established going into that season and she defeated Teri L. Davis, 21-20, 21-14, in the final.



Williams

Unfortunately for paddleball, most of the outstanding women players no longer compete in tournaments. There are only a handful still playing.

But Kathy Williams, now Kathy Harrison, 64, remembers her early paddleball career. She went on to play on the pro racquetball tour, where she was ranked in the top four nationally.

She was a graduate of Central Michigan University and went to Michigan State as a graduate assistant in Sports Science where she was introduced to paddleball. She soon began playing the game, generally against men.

"Paddleball was a male-dominated sport at MSU but I was strong enough to mix it up with these lunchtime warriors," said Harrison. "I was at the right place and right time in the evolution of the game. Unbeknownst

to me, through paddleball, my course in life was set."

About this time, she met paddleball great Steve Keeley, who worked at the MSU intramural building.

"He had a profound influence on my game," Harrison said. "He was efficient, clever and graceful on the court. I was in awe of his ability. For me, it was an opportunity to learn from the best. Bo, as he is known today, remains a good friend and our paths cross from time to time."

About this time, "Racquetball exploded onto the scene and finding a game of paddleball was difficult," Harrison said. "I do know that paddleball laid the foundation for my racquetball career. Even today, I will admit that my first love was paddleball.

"Our paddles were works of art as well as aerodynamic puzzles. We were always experimenting with weight, balance, grips and hole configuration in the paddles. Artwork on the paddles was a way of personalizing our games. We all played because we loved the physicality and strategies of the game. Weaknesses were easily exploited. There was nowhere to hide!"

As a pro racquetballer, she toured under the sponsorship of Seamco. The company backed the pro racquetball tour.

"In 1980, I was selected to participate on the ABC Super Stars competition in the Bahamas representing racquetball," Harrison said. "I came in as a complete unknown but ended up in third place earning me a big pay check."

Harrison has lived in Adelaide, South Australia, for 23 years. She has been an independent sporting goods rep for several companies, and



Williams in her playing days.

worked as an aircraft broker in Denver.

"Having failed retirement a few times, I now own and run an art gallery with my sister in historic Port Adelaide," she said. "It's called Jackalope Studio Gallery and is a converted horse stable. I also have a picture-framing business that my daughter-in-law runs."

In between work, Harrison said she "travels to see the world. I still backpack every year into remote areas and hike the hills around Adelaide most days. Now I share my hikes with kangaroos, koalas and emus."

Harrison still has good things to say about paddleball.

"I look back on those early days of paddleball and racquetball fondly," she said. "It was an exciting time to be a part of this evolving phenomenon. There was something exhilarating about being in this little room battling so closely with your opponent both mentally and physically.

"The glass-walled courts on the pro stops allowed the audience to be in that court at the same time. It was like being under a microscope. They were the best of times and I feel fortunate to have been a pioneer.

"I guess I can proudly say that I was the first National Paddleball Champion. I never thought about it much but I think it's pretty cool."

Paddleballers say adieu to old Bay City Y

(Editor's Note -- The YMCA on Madison Avenue in Bay City, Mich., has been the scene of many, many paddleball tournaments -- and is about to be replaced by the new Dow YMCA. Randy Wackerle, who has been instrumental in staging many of those tourneys, was asked to write an article on the building's PB history.)

Bay City has always been a paddleball "hot spot," outnumbering handball and racquetball players on Madison Avenue for over 50 years.

The YMCA has seen a lot of big matches and big name players shoot it out on the solid plaster walls. The Bay City Y has home-grown over 40 national PB champions since the 1970s. Bay City's Mike Wisniewski, Randy Wackerle and Mark Piechowiak have won 25 titles between them.



Wackerle

Courts A and B have seen the talents of Charlie Brumfield, Kelly Gelhaus, Steve Keeley, Dave Fleetwood, Andy Kasalo, Andy Mitchell, Val Valenciano, John Scheppele, Greg Novack, Steve Wilson, Randy Hoyle, Kevin McCully, Jim Swendris, Jim Sterken, Mark Kozub, Caprice Behner, Carla Teare, Anna Thomas and Jim Owens -- to name just the tip of the iceberg.

In the 1960s, Y members had a hard time finding playing time on just two courts. But in the 1970s, two courts were added to take off pressure of the bulging numbers playing the GAME.

In the 1980s, eight more courts were added with the purchase of the Sports Illustrated Club across town which generated two state doubles championships -- in 1982 and 1984.

Wackerle ran both tournaments and remembers that 119 teams played in the 1984 tourney which adds up to over 200 players.

Wackerle couldn't do it all himself and he cited Nancy Powers of the Y staff for her handling of entrants in all the tournaments and Scott Carmona, a former student and president of the Y board, who fought to get four courts in the new YMCA.

The final tournament on Madison Avenue in November of this year saw 10 players sign up -- five teams! Where have all the players gone?

The blind draw Turkey Tourney (1969) held for the last 43 years also has seen a dra-



The old Bay Family Y -- a paddleball mecca.

matic drop in interest. The early 1970s saw 30 to 35 players shoot it out for a frozen turkey, pumpkin pie for second and the famous ring of baloney for third.

Now we are lucky to get a dozen paddleballers to sign up. The Turkey tournament has been unique in a couple of ways over time -- it has kept records of champions for 43 years, and one year live turkeys were given for first place.

One great memory was Tom Haertel struggling to put the turkey into the trunk of his car after he had won.

Another PB tourney that started in Bay City in the early 1970s and still is going strong is the Bean-Smith Doubles. Wolf Hofflin started the Holiday Inn Tournament which became the Herb Bean Tournament until Bean, a circus clown, passed away.

A year later, Fred Smith -- a PB friend of Bean -- died and the name of the tournament became Bean-Smith.

With the change of directors over the years, the records for this tourney have been lost in history.

A third tourney that saw a run of 30 years was the high school paddleball championship started by Wackerle. This program introduced over 1,000 students to the sport of paddleball and created over a dozen national champions from the high schools in the Bay County area.

Some players still swinging paddles are Chad Krager, Mike Czabala, Chad Schwall, Eric Williams and Bob Groya.

The end of 2011 marks a new beginning and a new home for some old paddleball tournaments when the new Dow YMCA opens.

PADDLEBALL PROFILE



Melvin

Is there anyone in the Kalamazoo, Mich., area who DIDN'T start playing paddleball because of the Andys?

Craig Melvin, 56, who is from that city, responded as many have over the years to the question:

When did you start playing paddleball and why?

"At (Western Michigan University), with the Andys," he said. "And I like paddleball because of the camaraderie."

What does Melvin, a travel director and sports official, like about the game?

"The fairness of the competitors and the fellowship of great people and a great game," he said.

Asked to list any titles or high finishes, Melvin said:

"A Men's B in 1983 and countless consolations -- King of the Crud."

Any suggestions for improving the sport?

"Bring in some new 'meat,'" he said.

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