

NPA

(INDOOR / FOUR-WALL)

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

NEWSLETTER / FALL 2005-2006



Marv Gans



Larry Piper

PB has its hippies, too

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

Under the best of circumstances, paddleball is not a game for sissies.

That's why it's amazing to hear about players who have undergone hip-replacement surgery and still continue to play.

All of us have had our aches and pains during competition. But zipping around the court with an artificial hip is something else.

Two players come to mind immediately: Larry Piper and Marv Gans.

Piper, of Midland, Mich., can be referred to as PB's bionic man. Not only has he had both hips replaced, he also has a new shoulder and various other new body parts.

Gans, 73, of Northville Twp. in Michigan, has had FOUR hip replacements over the years.

Gans, who was the NPA's treasurer after it was reorganized in the

early 1970s, still plays PB two-three times a week.

He was an administrator at Schoolcraft College in Livonia for 39

years and in education for 48 years. He retired in December 2002.

"In 1981, my left hip was replaced," said Gans. "In 1983, the right hip was replaced."

Then, in 1994, "the left hip was replaced again and in 1996, the right hip was re-replaced," said Gans. "I guess I wore them out playing paddleball."

Gans said he tries "to get somebody (a fast, young partner) to cover shots over my head."

He won the 1988 national golden masters doubles with Gerry Heaton. In 2001, he finished second in golden masters with Harv Tomter of Eau Claire, Wis.

Gans got into PB when he was a teaching fellow at the University of Michigan in 1955-56. Gans and Steve Galetti "played as partners in a tournament in Flint," he said.

"I was using a cane, but kept it in the motel room so I wouldn't get picked on -- we finished third."

Gans still likes to play.

"I just don't have the mobility

Please see HIPPIES, Page 2

NPA tournament schedule set

The 2005-2006 NPA tournament schedule has been finalized except for one tourney.

The schedule:

FALL DOUBLES: Midland, Mich., Community Center, Dec. 2, 3, 4, 2005.

MIDWEST SINGLES: To be announced.

MIDWEST DOUBLES: Michigan Athletic Club, E. Lansing, Mich., Feb. 24, 25, 26, 2006.

NATIONAL SINGLES: Sorrento Valley Racquet Club, San Diego, CA, March 24, 25, 26, 2006.

NATIONAL DOUBLES: University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich., April 21, 22, 23, 2006.



TOMTER DIES -- Harv Tomter (above), an outstanding PBaller from Eau Claire, Wis., is dead at 71. See Page 7

Page 2 HIPPIES

Continued from Page 1

and flexibility I used to have,” he said. “Still enjoy the game, the strategy, and fellowship and will play as long as I can.”

Larry Piper, the bionic man, had his right hip replaced in 1988 and his left hip in 1989.

He also had a right shoulder replacement in late 1989.

Then, in 1999, he had heart problems. The three main arteries were 95, 80 and 65 percent blocked.

The next day, he had a triple by-pass.

Piper, 66, retired in 1993 as a chemical engineer with Dow Chemical after 32 years with the firm.

“I would say my hips have not bothered me while playing paddleball,” he said. “I am, of course, sore everywhere after playing.

“But so is everyone else ... I cannot move around the court as well as pre-surgery (and) my right shoulder never returned to pre-surgery form.

“However, without the surgery, my paddleball would have ended in 1989.”

Piper also has a secret: “I wear one of my wife’s girdles to hold everything in place.”

Piper also completed a remarkable effort in September 1994 in Huntsville, Ala., when he completed a Double Ironman Triathlon competition.

The distances were 4.8 miles of swimming, 224 miles of biking and 52.4 miles of run-



Baldori

ning!!

Piper finished in 35:38, beating the official cutoff limit of 36 hours by 22 minutes.

All but three of the 39 starters from throughout the world beat the time limit.

Len Baldori has been around the PB wars for a long time and has had both hips replaced.

Baldori, who lives in the Lansing, Mich., area and is a teacher and small-business owner, won the 1974 national open doubles crown with Steve Keeley.

Then, “after about six years of disuse and 14 of pain,” he said, “I got my first (hip) replacement in 2000 July ... Ouch ... Doc talked me into second December of 2000 ... Ouch.”

After about two years of rehab on his own, Baldori said, he “started hitting a little. I couldn’t hit the front and felt like my hips were not going to stay in. Slowly and steadily, I started to play.”

Baldori said the “hips are solid. Not as much flexibility as I would like. If I go after a ball like I would like to, I end up tearing muscle around the implant. Days of recovery. If I control my movements, then no problem.

“There is no pain inside the hip joint itself, just the surrounding muscle and tendon, etc.”

Baldori teamed with Charlie Brumfield in the Midwest Doubles Championships in February and they were well on their way to victory in the golden masters final when Baldori tore his Achilles tendon and had to forfeit.

Baldori said he is running now after surgery and will be hitting with his new “Whiz” paddle, made by Mike Wisniewski.

Larry Millen, a retired engineer from Farmington Hills, Mich., had his left hip replaced in February 2000.

“I am into my sixth year,” he said. “I have a full metal hip. Titanium inset into the bone and molybdenum ball and socket. It is a really tough joint.”

Millen, who plays out of Schoolcraft College in Livonia, said “My hip never bothers me while playing. On the contrary, since my hip was replaced, I move even better than before and play with absolutely NO pain or handicap. There is NO post-game pain either.

“I play three times a week and the best part is NO pain and NO limp. It is terrific.”

Millen said he had suffered hip pain for many years prior to the surgery



Millen Beckwith

and said the replacement “was one of the best things I ever did for myself.”

John Beckwith, a General Motors tooling center employee for 33 years, had his left hip replaced in January 1999.

Beckwith, of Flint, Mich., began playing PB at the Flint YMCA when he was in high school.

“The first game I played was against the Rev. (Walter) Taylor,” Beckwith said. “I thought I would take it easy on the old man. Well, I got my ass beat and I was gasping for air!! He gave me a pretty good lesson.”

Taylor was the first recipient -- in 1977 -- of the Earl Riskey Memorial Trophy for contributions to the sport of paddleball.

“When I play paddleball, I’ve no problems with the hip,” said Beckwith. “But I don’t have all the mobility I used to have. I think part of it is because I have to be careful not to injure my hip so I take it easy on the courts.”

Beckwith has another passion: riding road bikes. His goal: To ride his bike across the United States.

“In closing, I just want to say that having the surgery was the best thing I ever did because it gave me my life back to do what I want to do,” he said.

A laid-back way to play the game

Editor's Note: These are the combined observations of Jim Owens and John Lowman on the outdoor, three-wall PB tournament July 30, 2005, at Bloomingdale, Ill. Both competed in the event, which officially goes by the name Seasonal Concepts Annual Outdoor Paddleball Tournament.

JIM OWENS

You might call it the Dennis Negrete-runs-the-whole-show tournament.

"Crafty Negrete in consultation with Russ, Tony and others tampers with some of the NPA rules as well.

"Fundamentally, in addition to being held outdoors, the courts do not have back walls. Imagine how this changes the game.

"In the preliminary rounds, which started at 10 a.m. and lasted to maybe 7 p.m. or so, each team played each of the other teams a game up to 11 points with no allowable faults.

"That is to say, if you serve the ball short or long, the service is lost.

"You enter this tourna-

Adrian player dies

Gary Bishop, a long-time paddleball player from Adrian, Mich., is dead at 59.

Bishop died the weekend of September 11, 2005, after a long battle with cancer.

Bishop, who played with some success in the masters division in the 1990s, leaves his wife, four children and several grandchildren.



Bishop

A March 2000



Players and fans enjoy the sun and fun at the three-wall tourney.

ment as an individual player and rely on Negrete to match you up with an appropriate partner. The teams have been consistently competitive and everyone seems to have an extremely good time.

"After 8 or 9 hours of preliminary rounds, the real tournament begins. Win/loss records from the prelims determine the seeding for this single-elimination tournament. Conceivably, a team could lose every game in preliminary rounds and still win the big one.

"As for the scoring, you might play up to 11 points, possibly 15, maybe even 21. You have to check with the tournament directors to find out the 'rules and requirements.'

"At this point, it should be noted there is a generous amount of tasty food and good beer throughout the day. Well, good beer, if you like Busch Lite.

"The regular tourney ended about 1:30 a.m. the next morning, if I remember correctly.

"Thank you to everyone who organize and participate in this annual summertime fun-fest. See you next July."

JOHN LOWMAN

"What is so great about this event ...? Well, besides the 15-20 games that you play in the course of 12-14 hours in the heat and humidity of July, it's the participants!

"The group of men and women that play in this tournament year after year are worth the drive to hang out with for the day.

"This grab-bag event produces a new partner every year and lots of laughs.

"We have vowed to bring two new players with us (from Michigan) next year."

Lowman said he has set up some outdoor, three-wall PB in Michigan. Anyone interested can call him at (989) 277-7991.

(Editor's Note: Ron Malecki of Midland, Mich., and Lowman won the tourney last year and Malecki won it two years ago with another partner.)

Ex-paddleball champ captures state GAM golf crown

Casey Baker, a former junior paddleball champion, was the winner of the 2005 Golf Association of Michigan championship on Aug. 9.

Baker, 27, of Ann Arbor, Mich., earned a four-stroke victory over two other players with a two-day, 54-hole total at one-over 211 in the 84th GAM at the Country Club of Detroit.

Baker also reached the semifinals of the 2004 Michigan Amateur Golf Tournament.

He lost to the player who went on to win the title.

Baker is part-owner of Miles of Golf, a supplier and teaching academy in Ann Arbor.

Baker won the NPA national 12-and-under singles title in 1988.

Along with his brother Chris, Casey was the 1992 recipient of the Dmitri Remsberg Trophy, which goes to an outstanding young PBaller who exhibits skills and good sportsmanship.



Baker displays the 2005 GAM trophy.



Lapekas (above) gives the thumb's up sign (we think) after gagging down the pig's eye. At left, Lapekas appears to be thanking the animal that gave so much to so many to close out the 2004-2005 season.

Lapekas recognized at Pig Roast

Bob Lapekas was the man of the hour at the 2005 Pig Roast & Human Sacrifice for paddleballers and friends in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Each year for the last 29, a player or players are honored for their contribution to the sport of indoor, four-wall PB.

Lapekas, who started playing paddleball at the Kalamazoo YMCA in 1982, was instantly hooked on the sport after playing eight years of racquetball.

He thought: "Finally a game I

could be competitive at with my imposing height of 5'6" (Basketball was obviously not a long-term option.)"

Lapekas had to undergo Achilles tendon surgery and was out for a while.

"What has been most rewarding is all of the friends I have met playing the game," he said. "We just have a great time on and off the court.

"Not everyone finds a sport they love with such cardio benefits ... I FEEL BLESSED."

L.A. league established

A paddleball league has been formed at the L.A. Fitness Center in Torrance, Calif.

Diane Mueller, racquetball director there, said about 15 people

have tried -- and liked -- paddleball.

"We'll see how many will take it serious enough to play weekly," she said, adding that there now are six who play regularly.

NPA board clarifies some procedures

The procedure for a player to drop down a division was clarified by the NPA Board of Managers at a meeting Aug. 13, 2005, in East Lansing, Mich.

The following wording was approved:

= Singles and doubles wins will be considered separately.

= A player winning a division in a championship or national tournament must move up to the next-highest skill division the following tournament year.

= If a player wishes to move down to a lower skill division, he or she must petition the board through a letter, phone call or E-mail on the Website.

It also was

decided that a notation will be placed on all entry blanks to the effect that "entry is subject to the tournament director's discretion."

The NPA will attempt to raise promotional funds to assist West Coast players with travel expenses for the National Doubles.

The board will allot some of the funds for Midwest players to attend the National Singles in San Diego.

Participating in the meeting were Lou Hekhuis, Lorri Brigham, Jim Owens, Ron Malecki, Mike Wisniewski, Jer Fennell, John Lowman, Lou Giampetroni and -- on a conference call -- Kelly Gelhaus and Mike Czabala.



DIFFERENT BALLS -- Some of the real fun times for paddleballers were the golf outings staged by the Diehards of the Pontiac, Mich., area. Most were in that area but at least one was held in the Flint, Mich., area. A neat memento was a sleeve of golf balls carrying the NPA logo (above). Some players never took them out of the box, saying it would be blasphemous to hit the NPA logo. The golf balls were donated by Rick Detkowski, a top-level open player and a member of the Diehards.

She was born a-broad and she had a PB dream

Sue Giampetroni has been involved in paddleball for a long, long time.

Maybe too long.

She used to be a PB groupie, attending the many tournaments for years.

Then family responsibilities and the care of her mother precluded her from being at the events.

And players and fans used to inquire about why she wasn't there in recent years.

On October 6, 2005, she had a dream. It was about paddleball.

She had had a bout of bronchitis and was under the influence of cough syrup with codeine at the time.

Maybe that was the reason.

In her own words, Sue will recount the dream.

"I woke up really tired ... I was at a paddleball tournament all night ... It had an outdoor setting.

"Andy and Andy were there ... Kasalo's face looked real full ... with no wrinkles ... He still had that

cute smile and nice teeth.

"I asked him what he did to his face ... to look so smooth and he looked so much younger.

"Mitchell laughed at him and we teased him ... We asked him did he have Botox injections, or what?

"Anna and Carla played ... afterwards Anna said she just ordered a bunch of pizza ... asked everyone to chip in ... she took \$12 from me and said that should be plenty.

"A group of players were selling 'pizza fritta' (a bread-like delicacy covered with sugar) they had made ... there was a guy from Russia.

"I told him I was Italian and said Lou tells everyone I was born a-broad. (She really was. In Italy.)

"The Russian made about 42 in one hour and sold them for \$1 apiece ... I kept looking for Lou all night ... I saw Mike Whiz but I didn't talk with him."

(Editor's Note: We've all heard about psycho-babble ... Could this be paddleball-babble?)

Harv Tomter dies at 71

Harv Tomter, one of the most familiar faces of paddleball in Eau Claire, Wis., is dead at 71.

Tomter died July 23, 2005, in his home after a long battle with cancer.

He won the 1991 national golden masters singles championship and five national golden masters doubles titles in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In 1993, he was named recipient of the Earl Risky Memorial Trophy for his contributions to the sport of paddleball.

A retired lab technician, Tomter also was an outstanding minor league baseball player.

He played in the Giants and Orioles organizations.

He managed the minor league Eau Claire Cavaliers for 26 years.

The team honored him during a game after his death.

Mike Carlson, a former member of the NPA Board of Managers and a national PB champion from Eau Claire, said of Tomter: "He was an amazing person, friend and community leader."

"He touched the lives of many people and we are better for it."

Carlson said Tomter was honored by the Cavaliers at a reunion of his ballplayers shortly before his death.



Other Wisconsin players offered some words on Tomter:

Mike McMahon -- "My memories of Harv will always be the great times we always had traveling to paddleball tournaments.

"He also played with the heaviest paddle with no holes. Sometimes I wonder how his arm didn't fall off playing all those long weekend tournaments."

Matt West -- "On the court, Harv would give you a Physics or Geometry lesson with every shot. Sometimes his shot moved so slow, I don't know how the ball even made it to the front wall, but it did.

"You could be right there ... it didn't matter. All you could do is scratch your head and say 'nice shot.'"

"Harvey was always fun to road-trip with. He was always looking for an all-you-can-eat place because for a little man, he could really eat."

Paddleball Potpourri

By LOU GIAMPETRONI

More than thirty years ago, the NPA was faced with a major crisis.

The problem: The Pennsy P-100 paddleball had disappeared -- along with countless other items -- after the Middle East oil embargo in 1973.

There were no balls to be found. The few that remained were almost bounceless.

We tried just about everything -- tearing covers off tennis balls (didn't work well), using racquetballs (they were too lively) and trying a pink Spalding ball used by kids on the sidewalks of New York (also too lively).

Fortunately, no one took the suggestion of the late Bob Kendler -- handball guru -- to use a handball in the emergency.

Can you imagine!!

No tournaments were scheduled for the 1973-74 season except for the national championships -- both singles and doubles -- at Lake Forest College in suburban Chicago in 1974 but that was just because the previous year the tourney had been scheduled there.

In early 1974, the late Jim Phillips -- a Flint, Mich., player -- came up with a few dozen Pennsy P-100s. With that find, a group of Flint paddleballers decided to hold a doubles tournament in February of that year.

It was very successful, with more than 100 players participating.

The Nationals were held at the University of Michigan in April 1974 and the sport took off after that.

Penn began producing the ball again -- after personal efforts by NPA officials -- and the officials and players breathed a sigh of relief.

More recently, two Jackson, Mich., area players -- Gordy Hatt and Dave Haehnle -- came to the rescue of the NPA by entering into a deal with Penn to purchase paddleballs.

Thus, the all-important item in the sport -- the ball -- has been available these many years despite some scares.

Paddleballs

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



Kirkconnell

Paddleball Profile

“It’s a great way to stay young!”

That’s the assessment of Don Kirkconnell on why he plays paddleball.

Kirkconnell, still a kid at 35, began playing PB when he was 8 or 9.

Kirkconnell, who lives in Lawton, Mich., owns a custom woodworking business.

“The competition, the people, and the camaraderie” is why Kirkconnell loves the game.

Kirkconnell has won a state Men’s B singles crown and plays a lot of doubles.

How to improve tournaments?

“Somehow, get more people started so we can keep the game alive,” he said.

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