

SUMMER 2015



WWW.PADDLEBALL.ORG

NATIONAL PADDLEBALL ASSOCIATION

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN ...

Ann Arbor, Michigan -- Aahhh ... the Old IM (for intramural) Building at the University of Michigan.

It conjures up some wonderful memories.

This is where it all began -- in the courts of the cavernous Old IM Building at 606 E. Hoover St. It was the first such structure. There now are two more bright and shiny IM facilities on campus.

The late Earl Risky, generally credited with the development of four-wall paddleball, had a lot of false starts in the 1930s before the game blossomed. He was on the physical education staff and tore covers off tennis balls in an effort to get a ball that could be used for the sport.

There is a lot of paddleball history in the hallowed halls and 14 courts of the Old IM Building.

The court walls seemed to be indestructible -- made not of plaster, as most courts are, but of wood. They have been known over the years to be the bane of power hitters who suddenly find their power shots are negated by the resilient wood.

Four-time national singles champion Steve Wilson hated to play in tournaments there.

Wilson, who probably hit the ball harder -- all the time -- than anyone in the sport, felt he lost his edge when he played there.

For many years, the lights in the courts jutted out from the left wall and ceiling area so that they required a protective metal grate to be placed at an angle from ceiling to wall the length of the court.

Now get this -- if the ball struck the grate on the serve, it was a hinder. But once a rally got going, the grate was in play!

Some players got very adept at using the grate to their advantage. What might appear to be a lob toward the back, suddenly would hit the grate and drop near the front wall. POINT!

And to get to the courts was an adventure. Over the years, players were banged and bruised while going down the circular staircases to the courts from the balcony level.

Each staircase opened into two courts. Thus, there seven courts on each side of the playing area. And you got a tremendous workout just going from the second- or third-floor locker rooms to the court areas.

Then, around the mid-1980s the showers were modernized and many players said the place was sissified: they now had hot water!

While the courts have seen some of the best players in the history of four-wall paddleball, perhaps the most memorable match ever played there was the 1979 national singles final between Steve Keeley and Marty Hogan.

Keeley, a Michigan State University graduate, eventually won five national singles titles and two national doubles crowns.

Hogan, the national racquetball champion from San Diego, had never played in a National Paddleball Association tournament. Keeley was giving away nearly 10 years.

The match was played in Court 14 and the viewing area was jammed. It was an exciting match and Hogan eventually won in three games. It was the first of Hogan's two NPA national singles titles. He also won in 1987 over Wilson in a tiebreaker.

The Old IM Building is an old structure but many paddleballers wouldn't trade it for anything. -- LOU GIAMPETRONI



2015 National Singles & Grab Bag Doubles Championships

Andrew Price (Saginaw, MI) claims his first National Paddleball title in impressive fashion, defeating Jimmy Floyd (Flint, MI) 21-7, 21-9 in the Open Singles final.

Brandon Creamer (Lansing, MI) and Don Kirkconnell (Kalamazoo, MI) defeat Hall of Famer Andy Mitchell & his partner Ryan Minto (Davison, MI) in a very entertaining and competitive match, 21-14, 9-21, 21-16.

Three of paddleball's greatest were inducted into the National Paddleball Association's Hall of Fame, all women: Caprice Behner, Carla Teare, and Judy Shirley. Complete results follow and photos next page.

MEN'S OPEN

CHAMPION: ANDREW PRICE (SAGINAW MI) 21-7, 21-9
SECOND: JIMMY FLOYD (FLINT MI)
THIRD: BRANDON CREAMER (LANSING MI)
CONSOLATION: DON KIRKCONNELL (KALAMAZOO MI)

MEN'S A

CHAMPION: ADAM KOEHLER (BAY CITY MI) ROUND ROBIN
SECOND: JIM OWENS (ANN ARBOR MI)

MEN'S B

CHAMPION LYNN VERMEULEN (JACKSON MI) 21-8, 11-21, 21-19
SECOND: ANDY PAPPAS (DETROIT MI)
THIRD: CARL BRIGGS (SAGINAW MI) 21-11, 21-11

MEN'S C

CHAMPION: RANDALL SLAGER (GERMANTOWN TN) ROUND ROBIN
SECOND: DAN VIETH (DAVISON, MI)

45+

CHAMPION: ROBERT STONE (JACKSON MI) ROUND ROBIN
SECOND: MIKE WISNIEWSKI (BAY CITY MI)

55+

CHAMPION: ANDY MITCHELL (KALAMAZOO, MI) 21-8 21-8
SECOND: JIM SWENDRIS (ANN ARBOR MI)
THIRD: Jim Owens (ANN ARBOR MI)

GRAB BAG OPEN DOUBLES

CHAMPION: BRANDON CREAMER (LANSING MI) / DON KIRKCONNELL 21-14, 9-21, 21-16
SECOND: ANDY MITCHELL (KALAMAZOO MI)/ RYAN MINTO (FLINT MI)
THIRD: JOE BALDORI (LANSING MI) / JIM RICHTER (ANN ARBOR MI)

GRAB BAG A DOUBLES

CHAMPION: ROBERT STONE (JACKSON MI) / JIM HOWLAND (LIVONIA MI)

GRAB BAG B DOUBLES

CHAMPION: RANDALL SLAGER (GERMANTOWN TN)/ANDY PAPPAS (DETROIT MI)

2015 NATIONAL SINGLES CHAMPIONS



OPEN CHAMPION
ANDREW PRICE



MEN'S A CHAMPION
ADAM KOEHLR



MEN'S B CHAMPION
LYNN VERMEULEN



MEN'S C CHAMPION
RANDALL SLAGER



45+ CHAMPION
ROBERT STONE



55+ CHAMPION
ANDY MITCHELL



GRAB BAG OPEN CHAMPIONS
BRANDON CREAMER
DON KIRKCONNELL



GRAB BAG A CHAMPIONS
JIM HOWLAND
ROBERT STONE (ABOVE)



GRAB BAG B CHAMPIONS
RANDALL SLAGER
ANDY PAPPAS

National Paddleball Champ

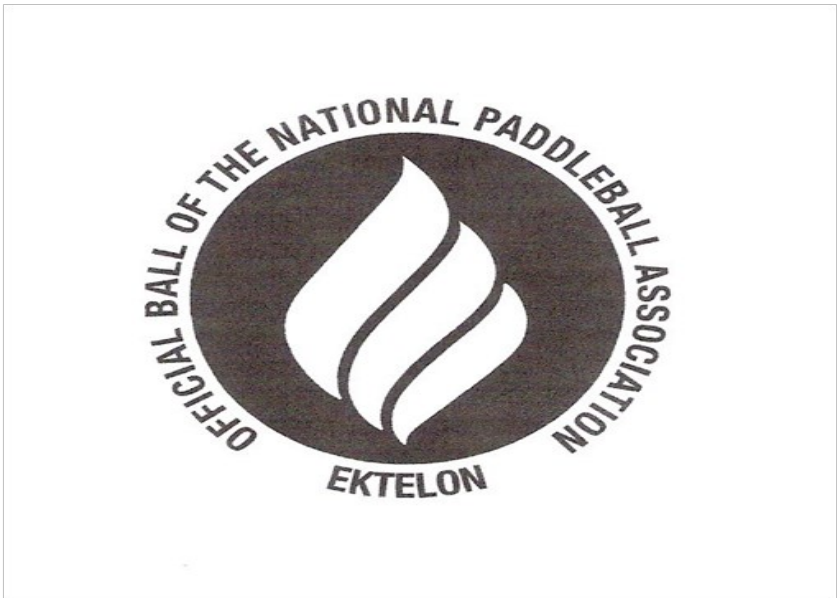
Andrew Price of Freeland, Michigan claimed his first National Paddleball title in impressive fashion, defeating Jimmy Floyd of Flint, Michigan 21-7, 21-9 in the Open Singles final at the Davison Athletic Club in Davison, Michigan, March 22, 2015.

Andrew, an Ektelon team member, has been a dominant force in Midwest paddleball the last few years. He was unable to play in this year's Midwest Singles Tournament but captured the 2013 and 2014 Open Singles titles. Chad Krager of Bay City Michigan and Andrew have teamed to win the last three consecutive Midwest Doubles Open Titles.

In racquetball, Andrew has also been a dominant force the last few years. On March 29, he earned his 3rd State of Michigan Open Singles title in the last 5 years, defeating Shannon Kohl of Grand Rapids, Michigan in the Open final, 13-15, 15-12, 11-3.

Impressive!

Jim Owens
National Paddleball Association
President



2015 NPA NATIONAL DOUBLES CHAMPIONSHIPS

Sorrento Valley Racquetball and Fitness Center (San Diego, CA)

April 24th to April 26th

Open

1st Todd Entrikin (Poway, CA) & Emmett Coe (Perris, CA) **21-16, 10-21, 21-14**

2nd Chris Crowthers (San Diego, CA) & Alvaro Beltran (Tijuana, BC, Mex.)

A

1st Bryce Cooper (Riverside, CA) & Michael Myers (Manifee, CA) **21-21, 21-16**

2nd Brannon Allison (San Diego, CA) & Marty Breed (Riverside, CA)

3rd Brian Hampton (San Diego, CA) & Jun Jeon (Seoul, South Korea)

Drop Down Craig Olney (San Diego, CA) & David Lorenz (San Diego, CA)

B

1st Mark Hassenstab (San Diego, CA) & Michael Alcorn (Oceanside, CA)

2nd Alex Robles (Riverside, CA) & Michael Burgett (Temecula, CA)

Drop Down David Leber (San Diego, CA) & Andy Leber (San Diego, CA)

C

1st Paul Lorenz (San Diego, CA) & Said Noroozi (San Diego, CA) **21-11, 20-21, 21-16**

2nd Phil Aten (Riverside, CA) & Rick Aten (Riverside, CA)

Drop Down Jerry Gaylord (San Diego, CA) & Joe Irons

Novice/Juniors

1st Andy Leber (San Diego, CA) & David Leber (San Diego, CA) **21-11, 21-11**

2nd Nico Leber (San Diego, CA) & Ronald Harpootlian (San Diego, CA)

Age (Combined 45+, 55+, 65+) DIVISON

1st Vince Carlone (El Cajon, CA) & Dale Valentine (Riverside, CA)

2nd Joe Paraiso (El Cajon, CA) & Rafael Fillippini (San Diego, CA)

70+ Combined

1st Chad Krager (Bay City MI & Kevin Mclaughlin) (San Diego, CA)

2nd Andy Mitchell (Kalamazoo MI & Mike Czabala (Camarillo, CA)

3rd Emmett Coe (Poway, CA) & Jacqueline Paraiso (Romona, CA)

Drop Down Brannon Allison (San Diego, CA) & Steve Price (San Diego, CA)

FOR SOME GREAT VIDEOS OF THE OPEN FINALS GO TO THE LINK BELOW PROVIDED CURTESY OF PETER “PILLAR OF SALT” CALLSTROM

<https://www.youtube.com/user/paddleland/videos>

2015 NATIONAL DOUBLES CHAMPIONS



**OPEN CHAMPIONS
EMMETT COE & TODD ENTRIKIN**



**MEN'S A CHAMPIONS
MIKE MYERS
BRYCE COOPER**



**MEN'S B CHAMPIONS
MARK HASSENSTAB
MICHAEL BURGETT**



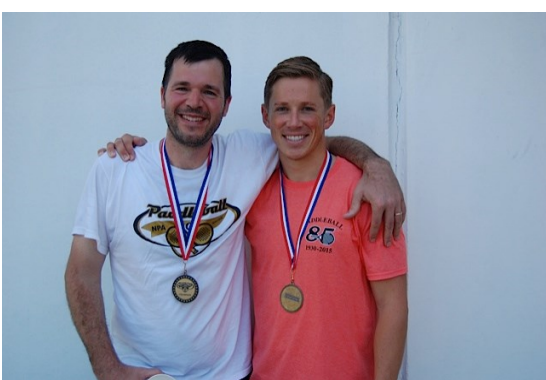
**MEN'S C CHAMPIONS
PAUL LORENZ
SAID NOROOZI**



**NOVICE/JUNIOR CHAMPIONS
ANDY LEBER
DAVID LEBER**



**45+ CHAMPIONS
VINCE CARLONE
DALE VALENTINE**



**70+ COMBINED CHAMPIONS
CHAD KRAGER
KEVIN MCLAUGHLIN**

NPA 2015 ANNUAL AWARDS

The NPA presents three annual awards each to honor a person in paddleball for various achievements.

THE EARL RISKEY is awarded in honor of the founder of the great game of paddleball to the person who has contributed most to the sport.

THE SPORTSMANSHIP given annually to the person who most represents the American ideal of good sportsmanship under extreme competitive conditions.

THE REMSBERG AWARD given to an up and coming player who shows great potential in the sport of paddleball



LEN SONNENBERG
2015 EARL RISKEY WINNER



AARON EMBRY
2015 SPORTSMANSHIP WINNER



NICO COLOMA
2015 THE REMSBERG AWARD WINNER
Presented by Aaron Embry

2015 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Caprice Behner



Caprice (on the left) submitted this photo on a Pickleball Court in Bonaire, a Caribbean Island, where she lives during the Michigan winter.

Caprice Behner holds the record for the most National Women’s Open Singles Championships in the history of paddleball, nine from 1977 to 1996. In National Women’s Open Doubles, she teamed with Yvonne Hackenberg in 1982 and with Terry (Smith) Delcamp in 1998 to win championships. Caprice and Mike Wisniewski won the National Open Mixed Doubles titles in 1995 and 1999.

Caprice was a smart and gifted player with the ability to consistently shoot forehand and backhand with extreme accuracy; regarded by many players at the time, as being the best woman shooter in the game. She knew how to set up the pass with the kill and the kill with the pas

The NPA awarded Caprice Behner with its Sportsmanship Trophy in 1982. She was a very smart, competitive, and fair paddleball player.

Following is a list of Caprice Behner’s National Titles.

Women’s Open Singles (9)
1977, 1981, 1982, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996

Women’s Open Doubles (2)
1982 with Yvonne Hackenberg 1998 with Terry (Smith) Delcamp

Mixed Open Doubles (2)

2015 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Carla Teare



Carla being inducted into the Hall of Fame at Davison, Michigan, March 22, 2015, by Lou Giampetroni and Andy Mitchell.

Carla Teare has more national championship titles than any other woman in the history of paddleball, sixteen in total. She and her sister, Anna Thomas, claimed eight Women’s Open Doubles National titles from 1985 to 1993, and Carla teamed with Andy Kasalo to collect three National Mixed Open Doubles from 1991 to 1994. In Women’s Open National Singles, Carla won four consecutive times from 1983 to 1986 and collected her fifth title in 1988.

Always a tough, aggressive, well-conditioned, and fair competitor, Carla habitually outlasted her opponents. She was a talented paddleball player; an excellent shooter, who was never afraid to take “the big shot.”

Carla Teare was clearly a dominant tournament player from 1983 to 1994.

Following is a list of Carla Teare’s National Titles.

Women’s Open Doubles (8)

1985 with Anna Thomas	1989 with Anna Thomas
1986 with Anna Thomas	1990 with Anna Thomas
1987 with Anna Thomas	1992 with Anna Thomas
1988 with Anna Thomas	1993 with Anna Thomas

Mixed Open Doubles (3)

1991 with Andy Kasalo	1994 with Andy Kasalo
1992 with Andy Kasalo	

2015 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES
Judy Shirley



Judy being inducted into the Hall of Fame at Davison, Michigan,
March 22, 2015, by Jim Swendris.

From 1978 to 1996, Judy Shirley claimed ten National Women’s Open Championships with two different partners: six with Grace Louwsma and four with Barb Johnson. That is more than any woman in the history of NPA paddleball. In addition, Judy won the National Women’s Singles Championship in 1978 and a National Mixed Championship with Jim Owens in 2012.

Judy is a highly skilled right-sided player with an astute ability to make the right shot at the right time, regarded as one of the smartest players in paddleball. At the date of induction, Judy is still a tenacious but fair competitor. She maintains a passion and respect for the game and has earned considerable respect from her partners, opponents, and spectators.

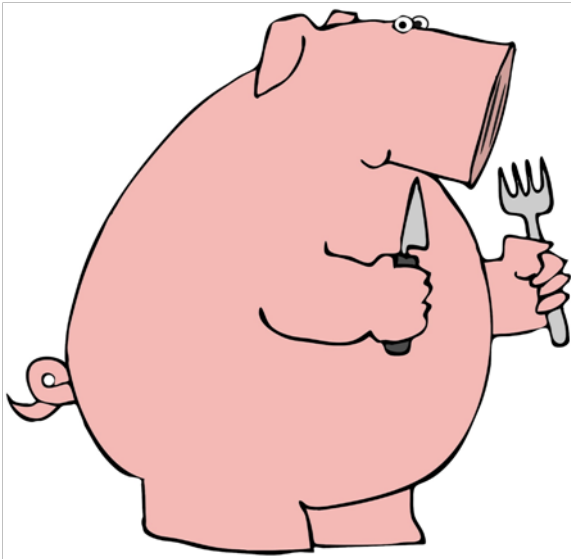
Following is a list of Judy Shirley’s National Championships

Women’s Open Doubles (10)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1978 with Grace Louwsma | 1991 with Barb Johnson |
| 1979 with Grace Louwsma | 1994 with Barb Johnson |
| 1980 with Grace Louwsma | 1995 with Barb Johnson |
| 1981 with Grace Louwsma | 1996 with Barb Johnson |
| 1983 with Grace Louwsma | |
| 1984 with Grace Louwsma | |

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1978 Women's Open Singles | 2012 Mixed Doubles with Jim Owens |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|

UPCOMING TOURNEYS



PIG ROAST AND HUMAN SACRIFICE

Kalamazoo MI -

Saturday, August 15th

BAC Athletic Club (for tourney)

VFW (for Roast)



3 WALL & 1 WALL

PADDLEBALL

&

PADDLEBALL/HANDBALL

COMBINED EVENT

Please "Like" our

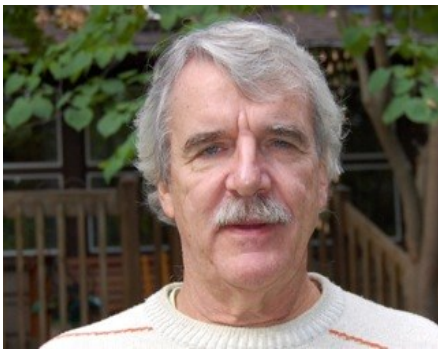
3 WB Event

Facebook page for

Weekly updates and

Event news

ALSO, THE NPA BOARD WILL HOLD AN ANNUAL MEETING IN LATE SUMMER
AND WE WELCOME YOUR IDEAS, CRITICISMS, AND INPUT. PLEASE EMAIL:
NPA.PADDLEBALL@GMAIL.COM



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The IM

Lou had written the lead article, “Where at All Began,” without knowing that the Intramural Sports Building at the University of Michigan, the “IM,” would close for a massive renovation April 20th. Those fourteen vintage hard courts described by Lou, the courts in which Earl Risky started NPA style paddleball in 1930, will be completely removed.

Forty to fifty players and former players gathered April 18th to play or to watch others play paddleball one last time at NPA paddleball’s most historic site. Phil Conlin sought and received the approval for the gathering from the building supervisor. In Phil’s invitation to players, he noted: “On April 20th, 2015 the Intramural Sports Build in Ann Arbor is closing as we know it, a \$22,000,000 renovation.” When the “IM” reopens in twelve to fourteen months, it will have only three new courts.

Times certainly have changed. In the 70s and 80s, it was hard to reserve a court at the “IM.” On Sunday mornings while the building was closed to the general public, the U-M Paddleball Club had claim to all fourteen courts. Preston Martin, a regular Sunday morning player, noted in a newsletter article a couple of years ago: “I recall those gatherings at the “IM”. In the heyday of paddleball, the ‘70s and early ‘80s, all 14 courts often would be filled with players and several players would be waiting for open courts.”

I have certainly had some great times at the birthplace of NPA paddleball, had and watched countless fantastic matches, met a lot of good people, and developed several long term friendships. The “IM” was unquestionably my favorite place to play.

Recollections, photos, Lou’s article “Where is All Began,” this article, and other articles on the “IM” will be compiled and posted on For those of you who have played at the “IM,” I encourage you to share a memory, multiple memories, or photos go to <http://npa.paddleball.org/npa-info/im-courts-remembered/>

otos. Send them to me at jmowens2@gmail.com for posting. To view this compilation, find the tab under the NPA drop-down on paddleball.org, “IM” Courts Remembered URL: <http://npa.paddleball.org/npa-info/im-courts-remembered/>

NPA NATIONAL DOUBLES

By Jamie Lawson

April is really nice in San Diego. It's warm and verdant. At the beginning of the month the mustard flowers light up the hillsides and by the end of the month the jacarandas speckle the view with a dry, purple lushness that lasts until summer. After the equinox, the sun opens up and the light is sunflower yellow. That is, until the NPA Doubles. As soon as the first Michigander walks down the jet way at Lindberg Field, the clouds roll in. It's as predictable as the cycle of the moon. But that's okay because we love our northerly friends...and because we need the rain.

This year was no different. The gray-fringed nimbus clouds marked the arrival of the draw sheets on the wall, and we wondered openly if Coe and Entriiken would be able to repeat.

It was a frustrating time for me. Six weeks prior I fell victim to a pinched nerve in my neck and shoulder, making life altogether painful and it impossible to play. I should be at home with a heating pad wrapped around my shoulder, but I've been asked to participate in the presentation of the Risky Trophy to Lenny Sonnenberg, an award I feel is long overdue. That presentation makes it worth me coming out to the club. NPA Chairman Jim Owens greets me at the door and offers me a warm handshake. As he presses down, a shock wave runs from the tip of my index finger up the arm and down through my shoulder. I try to mask the pain with a smile but I guess it's unsuccessful as Jim gets a curious look and says "that's probably exactly the wrong thing for you right now, isn't it?" I nod, and change the subject to the award. There are conflicting objectives here. On the one hand, we need to get everyone together to make the awards, and on the other hand, the award winners don't even know who they are. I still don't know who's won for Sportsmanship.

Aaron Embry is buzzing around trying to keep matches on schedule; making sure that there are towels for the locker rooms, generally keeping this train on the rails. But he's as frustrated as I am by health issues and had to withdraw from the open division due to a cold; no doubt germs carried in on those gray nimbus clouds from Michigan. In a moment of respite, I ask Aaron a question. You see, there is good reason to speculate about Coe and Entriiken. Alvaro Beltran is in the tournament. He's playing with Chris Crowther. Alvaro doesn't show up with a paddle very often. But when he does it's impressive. Four or five years ago we got him to come out. That was for the Mannino Open, a combined paddleball/racquetball tournament. Alvaro didn't even have a paddle when he showed up for that one. We had to find a loaner for him; one of those clunky old generic plywood models with a red varnish slapped on it. Alvaro ended up taking home a pretty good paycheck from the Maninno. He won in racquetball, both singles and

doubles. He won the paddleball doubles with Crowther, and he made it to the paddleball singles final against Crowther but they never played. At the end, Alvaro handed the clunky red plywood paddle back over the counter and we haven't seen him with a paddle in his hands since.

Aaron actually faced Alvaro in the Maninno. In the doubles semifinal, Aaron and Steve Trent played Alvaro and Crowther. So I ask Aaron what Alvaro was like: "At the beginning of the match", says Aaron, "Alvaro was like a high B player. By the end of the match he was the best in the world". So this year's NPA Doubles is going to be an interesting show. Alvaro is teamed with Crowther again, and no clunky red plywood paddle this time. He's there representing Gearbox which has just introduced, arguably, the most sophisticated paddle on the market.

But remarkably, there's still a big question about whether Chris and Alvie will even get to the final. There's a third team that would seem like a real dark horse unless you knew them. Cesar Carrillo is playing with Kris Odegard. We all know that Cesar is a paddleball specialist. Not so for Kris. He was a top 10 racquetball player even though he only played about half the stops on the tour. Then he left to go to law school. Kris is willing to experiment with things. A couple years ago I was supposed to play an outdoor racquetball tournament with Crowther, but The Giant wooed out at the last minute. But Kris Odegard was in town and he showed up to sub for Crowther. We lost in the semis of the pro division, and with high certainty, we didn't get that far on my play. Remarkably, that was the first time that Kris had ever played outdoor. Pretty good for a rookie. We've lured him out onto the paddleball court a couple times, too, and Kris has absolutely crazy skills. He's fast, he's strong, he's smart. His swing is (dare I say) as smooth and sweet as Aaron Embry's. And right after the presentation of these awards, it's going to be Kris and Cesar versus Alvie and The Giant on court 1. This will be amazing.

Things are about to get underway. Aaron has cleared the courts and brought everyone together in the foyer for the presentation of the awards. Kevin McLaughlin goes up to the second step that serves as our makeshift podium to present the award for Sportsmanship. And the award goes to...Aaron Embry. Aaron is genuinely surprised and trying to figure out what to do. Is he still the host or has he just become the guest of honor? He never expected it. Meanwhile everyone else is saying "duh!". Aaron teaches this sport, and that gives sportsmanship different scope and expression. Sportsmanship is integrated into the most fundamental building blocks of the game Aaron teaches. His first lesson includes how to use your footwork to give your opponent room. Needless to say, I was never a good student. I got in Aaron's way once at a crucial point in a final. He was mildly upset and took a hinder. Eight months later he called me to apologize, and said that getting upset was one of the events he regretted most. "Dude, it was tournament point!". No one better deserves this award more than Aaron, the paddleball evangelist.

Continued on next page

So I've got this short speech worked out, and the idea is that about four sentences in, Lenny's going to realize that he's won the Risky. My speech is about diversity, and how we've been reaching out over the past few years to bring more and different people into the sport, and how this year's NPA Doubles reflects that diversity. We've got the Paraiso sisters, and they're playing paddleball at the highest level. We've even got the Paraiso brothers, and they've never played in an NPA event before. We've got Jun Jeon from Seoul, South Korea. We've even got folks from Memphis. We've got kids like the Leber boys Nico, Andy, and David. In fact, Nico just received the award for most promising new player. We've got racquetball players. We've got Canadian and Mexican nationals in the draw. Kris Odegard is from Saskatoon, and Alvaro Beltran is *the reason racquetball grew to such great importance in Mexico. And in the next hour we're going to see how this new diversity is reshaping our sport and changing this tournament. But for years, Lenny has worked within our sport's peculiar demographic. It's a case of "we've got lemons, let's make lemonade". Lenny has used the vehicle of Senior Olympics not only to increase participation in paddleball, but to expose the entire community of senior athletes to our sport and what we do in it. We need this hard won diversity to sustain the sport. But the fact that senior athletes continue to be drawn to paddleball is and always will be a very good thing, and Lenny is key to that!*

Alvaro Beltran is no stranger to Sorrento Valley Racquetball, Court 1. The first time I saw him, he was warming up on this court. He was probably 14 at the time, maybe the skinniest kid I ever saw. It was 1994. Alvie was getting ready to play Tony Gelso in the first round of the Splatshot Open. He was very comfortable on this court and spent as much time horizontal as he did vertical. Gelso eeked out a victory in that match. In fact he won the tournament, but Alvie gave him a wakeup call. Alvie's still comfortable on this court. The Giant's feeding him setups during warmup and Alvie is hitting reverse pinches that roll, one after another out of the left prong. Kris and Cesar come on the court. Cesar's looking thinner than he was two years ago when he played the NPA Doubles in Riverside. Kris and Chris are on the left. Cesar and Alvie are on the right. Game one goes back and forth. There are more flat rollouts—no bounces, just roll—than I have ever seen. The whole game is a highlight reel. There are gets and covers and fighting off a ball that's moving at a pace few players ever experience up close and personal. Cesar is tracking the ball the way he was five years ago, and he strikes it inches off the floor to hit punishing killshots that somehow Alvaro routines. Kris and Cesar serve at game point but somehow they can't win the rally and so Alvie and the Giant squeak out a 21-20 win. That appears to deflate Kris and Cesar. They drop behind in game 2 and are never able to close the gap. Match to Alvie and The Giant.

The final is going to be interesting. All of these guys hit hard. All of them can move. Emmett Coe and Chris Crowther were on opposing teams in a paddleball doubles final on this same court a couple months ago. Crowther came out on the winning end of that one, in a squeaky tight breaker. But the teams weren't as balanced. Crowther was playing with Jun Jeon in that one. Jun had been playing paddleball for a year. Emmett was playing with Danny Lavelly, who's a great racquetball player but had never seen a paddle before. Down the stretch, The Giant worked Lavelly hard on the serve. That won't happen with Todd Enriken receiving. At the same time, Todd and The Giant are both used to dominating. But general consensus is that in The Giant's semifinal, his partner, Alvaro Beltran, was the most dominating player on the court. Each of these teams has a bread-and-butter player: Todd on one side and The Giant on the other. To be sure, it's Michelin Five Star bread with really sweet butter. But their partners, Emmett and Alvie, are unusually creative, and with superb hand-eye coordination. I've been on the court with Emmett, literally, hundreds of times, and he's very difficult to play against because he will invent new things on the fly. It's not just that he hits an unusual shot, but he will hit it out of unusual footwork or unusual timing. For instance, he might delay and let a crosscourt ball come all the way across his body, then face into the sidewall, and then snap a back-hand reverse pinch that comes out so quickly that you can't anticipate or see it coming. Next time he might hit the same shot, but hit it early instead of waiting. Or he might use the same timing and hit down the line. Or he might do something completely different. He's also very creative in his coverage. He's fast enough to pick which side he goes around you so that you can't anticipate. He can also use that to sneak in and hit a ball that you thought was down. Or sneakier still, he can move into a position where you're sure he'll call a hinder and so you stop play, then he'll squirt around and hit the ball for an easy winner when you're off guard. Emmett did this to Alvaro early in the match, and Alvaro seemed very confused by it.

Alvaro's creativity is similar, but probably focuses a little more on coordination and a little less on speed. In racquetball, he can use the side of the racket, or he can strike with the wrong face of the racket, or from behind him or around the head, and make it all look smooth. With a paddle rather than a racket, he simply has more time to do all of this and so when he plays paddleball, he invents new shots that no one has ever seen before. In game 1 of the final, Alvaro probably hit 20 shots that I'd never seen. I'd seen most of Emmett's shots, but that's only because I play with him, and fans new to these players must have seen a match that was both thrilling and extraordinarily novel! There were boasts and covers of the boasts and kills from six feet between the legs, and overheads and switches and reverse pinches that came down from the sky. Miracle shot followed miracle shot, and at first the crowd went wild, but then we came to expect it. A strange situation developed where a player would glance up to the gallery when he hit a particularly great shot as if to say "it's okay to applaud that one", and then the cheers would follow.



Emmett and Todd came on strong at the end and sealed game 1, partly due to a flurry of kill shots by Emmett from the left. Alvie and The Giant came out on opposite sides for the second game. This was unusual because The Giant usually likes the left. Presumably, Alvie thought his lower center of gravity would do better at neutralizing Emmett, and it seemed to work. Though well played on both sides, Alvie and The Giant took control in the second game. The third game saw a similar change. Todd and Emmett switched sides putting Emmett back with The Giant, this time on the right. I'd never seen Todd play the left before, but he managed it quite well. And on the right, Emmett was able to stay in front of Crowther. In fact, at one point, Chris hit Emmett in the ear with the ball. Emmett is really hard to beat if you let him stand in front of you. His hands are just too fast. Alvie and The Giant seemed to figure out how to adjust to this new alignment late in the tiebreaker, but by that time, their fate was sealed. Emmett Coe and Todd Entriiken won their repeat title, 21-15 in 2015, and in my opinion, this match changed our game. We are now in the era of the creative player: the shot maker rather than the shot taker. And it's going to be fun!

Perhaps the most salient difference between this tournament and the last paddleball tournament I saw Alvaro play was that Alvaro didn't have to hand a loaner paddle back across the counter when he was done. His sponsor, Gearbox, seems to be all-in for paddleball. Other Gearbox racquetball players, like Jimmy Vequez—whom we've never seen with a paddle before, or maybe only once—were also in the draw, as was Rafael Filippini who owns the company. Emmett and Todd both used Ektelon paddles for their final victory. So we may be seeing more racquetball converts. Gearbox and Ektelon have both labored hard over their paddles to get them right. Hopefully, their players appreciate that.

Shortly after the Michiganders left and the sun returned to our Southern California skies, one of those racquetball converts, Jun Jeon (from the e-Force family) told us that he was going back to Seoul. He'd like to come back to the US someday, but visas are hard to get. He's a good friend and we will dearly miss him! But he took his paddle with him, along with a love of the new game, and he hopes to teach our sport to others. Maybe the next time the sun dims over San Diego in April, there will be two planes debarking at Lindberg Field, one from Detroit, and the other from South Korea.

