USA Takes American Zone Competition

by Michael Arndt

USA Coach Ed Martin has a philosophy that weaker teams improve through instruction and playing superior or opposition. By using that measure, his "mission" is to help other countries develop their game and raise their skill level.

If the results of the racquetball competition at the second American Zone Championships are any example, then Martin can consider it Mission Accomplished. The combined men and women's team merely won 32 of 33 matches, all but five of 68 games, and outscored its closest pursuer, Canada, by more than a two-to-one margin. Mexico, finished third, only one match behind Canada.

Host country, Ecuador was fourth, followed by Costa Rica while Bolivia and Columbia tied for sixth. Puerto Rico and Venezuela were eighth and ninth respectively.

But the crushing U.S. victory at the zone competition between the Americas, held November 28 through December 8 was only a portion of the happenings. That can be experienced considering -

Quito, the capital of Ecuador, was celebrating a once-in-a-lifetime event - its 450th birthday.

When humans who are used to competing at about sea level get together nearly two miles closer to the sky, then they can expect to find themselves short of breath from time to time.

Incidentally, the zone competition also just happened to be the qualifying site for the World Games in London next July. Only 11 men and 11 women from North and South America could qualify.

The primary purpose of the American Zone Competition was to select the best teams in the Americas. However, it was obvious by the representation - only two countries, U.S. and Ecuador, fielded full men's and women's teams and only three countries had doubles teams - that qualifying for the World Games was the priority for most countries.

"Because of what happened here, there may be some other means of selecting World Games participants," said Luke St. Onge, executive director of the International Racquetball Federation (IARF), sanctioning body for all international events. St. Onge said he would discuss the issue with the IARF World Congress at its next meeting.

What will be the outcome is only coincidental to what happened. The USA, led by intercollegiate champ Andy Roberts and team captain Cindy Baxter, took the top three places in the men's division and first, third, and fourth in the women's category. Despite the near sweep, the U.S. has all other countries may only send a maximum of two men and two women to compete in London.

Columbia and Mexico each qualified two men and two women; Canada, Ecuador, and Puerto Rico qualified one man and one woman. On the women's side, Canada and Ecuador will send two each and Costa Rica qualified one position. In all, 31 men and 11 women from the two countries may compete in the field of 60 next July.

While the U.S. and Canada were prohibitive favorites to finish one and two in both divisions, no such odds could be given to any of the other countries. Even the betting line on the Canadian by changed.

Canada, like six other countries, brought only a skeleton team. By the coach's admission, the decision "nearly backfired." It could have been a fatal shot, as all three of their big guns were injured.

The team format separated round robins for the No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3 singles players and doubles from each country. If a country brought but one player, he was placed to play No. 1. The top two finishers in each round robin were virtually guaranteed berths for their countries in the World Games; however, they were placed in a regular bracket with only a tiebreaker loss to consider.

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7. Wilson

Bulliard and Pinelli qualified for the team recently by winning the U.S. National Doubles in Boise, ID in October. Their main competitors from the 1984 Doubles, Kevin VanDeenke, Finlay, OH and Dan Omrieks, North Huntington, PA were not tested in any of the three doubles matches they played.

It wasn’t a coincidence that the international flair of racquetball came to the Quito Racquet Club during its biggest celebration in 50 years, a week-long occasion complete with bull fights, circuses, a massive food festival, dancing in the streets, and other revelry.

At Walker, IARF vice president for South America, coordinated the World Congress to award the games to Quito because Ecuador would be the host for the 1987 Pan American Games. In addition, the Ecuadorian Olympic Committee selected racquetball as one of the demonstration sports in the games which follow the Olympics.

Though it had not yet been determined at press time, it is possible that financing difficulties will result in shifting the games from Ecuador to Indianapolbs.

The major sponsor of the American Zone Championships, is prepared to help finance the racquetball portion of the Pan Am Games, according to Walker. Five other international companies—AMF Head, ITT, Polaroid, Nixx, Xerox, and eight other national companies—donated $14,000 to put on the American Zone Competition II, Walker said. Quito Racquet Club donated the court time, Maintenance and management for the tournament. Contributing from Ecuador were Alpha Tours, Cerveza, the textile firms of Ecuqueno and Farnese, Marathon Sports, H.J. Beasch Construction, shirt manufacturer Printofex and Superman, a supermarket chain.

They also footed the bill for the tournament’s crowning achievement, the festive awards banquets at the Quito Tennis Club where each of the nine countries donated more than 250 players, coaches, officials, and dignitaries.

An organizing committee provided each country with two or three attachments to help them through any rough spots they may have incurred with the culture and language barriers. The Americans and Canadians benefited most. Several of these attachments took a leave of absence from work for eighteen to 12 days, according to Al Walker, owner of the club who orchestrated the tournament and its surrounding activities.

“These people (volunteers) did it out of the kindness of their hearts,” he said.

Because of the well-laid plans and the attachment, the tournament wasn’t all pinches, paeans, spats and heated arguments. Other activities included tennis, tennis, shopping, bargaining, trading, dancing, dining, and meeting some top salt-of-the-earth people in the middle of the world as Quito is designated (for being only minutes from the equator).

Because there were only two matches a day, participants had plenty of opportunity to bask in the sun, sightsee, enjoy the night life, festivities, and purchase quality leather and woolen goods for many times less than retail prices in countries outside Latin America.

The biggest surprise, according to John Hamilton, executive director of the Canadian Racquetball Association, was the playing conditions of the courts, the quality of food and the quality of living in Quito.

Based on information contained in a series of recent articles by free lance writer Carole George and former professional Steve Kellett, the Canadians were prepared for a sub-par playing and living environment, Hamilton said.

One variable that everyone counted on did exist. The altitude. At nearly 10,000 feet above sea level, players experienced a faster ball and some difficult breathing. The Penn ball cans were opened two to three weeks prior to competition to slow them down. Calling balls still bounded too close to the horizon!

At least half of the 12-member USA team required oxygen during the competition, according to Coach Ed Martin. “The altitude definitely affected us, though, it didn’t have any effect on winning or losing” any matches, Martin said. Arriving a few days before the competition helped the players adapt, he said.

Though the Canadian team prepared by playing at Ft. St. John in the Rocky Mountains, about 5,000 feet above sea level, Hamilton agreed that arriving early in Quito helped. “The longer you stay at altitude the more chance of getting used to it,” he said.

The anticipated showdown between the world’s racquetball superpowers never materialized. Hamilton said a lack of finances made it impossible to field a full team.

“I was disappointed that Canada didn’t bring a full team,” Martin said. “I think the organizers told them that if they were going to enter a team they had to bring all the doubles teams.”

Martin added, “We were looking forward to a rematch of the 1984 match. Ross Harvey and I, looking forward to a rematch of the 1984 match. Ross Harvey said, “I don’t feel like it was our mission to win, Martin said. “Our mission is to help them (Latin America) develop their game and raise their skill level.”

(Racquetball In Review continued on page 3.)

USA Team Coach Ed Martin addresses the more than 250 people attending the American Zone Competition Awards Banquet just prior to a slide presentation.

IARF Executive Director Luke St. Ongen makes a joke in the post-tournament press conference at the American Zone Tennis Club the last night of the tournament.

USA’s Cindy Baxter follows through with backhand in her tour match with Canada’s teen phenom, Crystal Fried. Baxter ruled undimmed 15-5, 15-6.
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Steve Strandemo, racquetball professional, teacher, and author of Advanced Racquetball.
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The Year In Review

January is certainly the time for reflection on the past year as well as time for looking into a promising future for the coming year. 1984 was a great year for our sport. Beginning with the Lite/AARA Regionals, which were for the first time qualifying events for the Nationals, all competitions were unequalled in success. The National Intercollegiates hosted 32 colleges with 250 entries, and over $6,000 in scholarship money was distributed by Lite Beer.

After the National Singles we moved to the Junior Regionals and the National Junior Championships with 650 entries converging on Davison, MI this past June. The Referee Certification Program was introduced, as well as the new membership package which was increased for the everyday player.

Then, finally, in November, the year ended with the U.S. National Racquetball Team qualifying for the World Games by competing in the American Zone Competition in Quito, Ecuador. Membership in the AARA mounted to 35,000 and the American Racquetball Handicap System made the National Rankings solid.

August inaugurated the first Elite National Training Camp with 120 players in attendance from five countries. Ages ranged from 13 to 74 years for both men and women. Racquetball rules were updated and over 70,000 new rule books have been distributed.

In May, the National Singles Championships were held in Houston and were a true happening in our sport with over 900 entries, and, at times, 3,000 spectators and players crowding the Downtown YMCA. More than $90,000 in membership rebates have been returned to the states associations, making each state organization strong, as evidenced by the growth in membership.

July found the U.S. Team in competition in the World Championships held in Sacramento, CA, and winning its second straight World Championships event.

In October, 250 teams vied for National titles in Boise, ID, at the U.S. Doubles Championships. The Junior League Program, sponsored by DP and Penn Athletic Products Company, came into the spotlight; also Penn continued its "Juniors Only" tournament.

What does 1985 promise? All of the above, plus the excitement of the World Games in London this summer, followed by the World Masters Games in Toronto, Canada for ages 35-60, both men and women. We have projected total membership to increase to 45,000 in 1985, and we expect the AARA to take a more total role in leadership in the industry. Our special thanks go to Lite Beer, DP Penn Athletic Products Company, and Wilson Sporting Goods for their continued support of our great sport.
In case you haven't been introduced, CBK (its proper name is Graphite CBK18) is the most powerful racquet in racquetball. That's why top pros like Dave Peck, Lynn Adams and Mike Yellen all play with it. And why it's used by more top tournament players than all other racquets combined.
Women's Open


Men's Open


Men's 50's


Men's 60's


Men's 70's


Women's Open


Women's 50's


Women's 60's

CALENDAR

Complete calendar of MABA sanctioned tournaments

JANUARY, 1985

January 4

Tennis Challenge
Downtown YMCA
Houston, TX

January 7-10

Sundown East Tournament
New Mexico Invitational
Albuquerque, NM

January 9-12

New Year Open
South Jordan, UT

January 11

Golden Triangle YMCA Benefit Tournament
Syracuse, NY

January 16-19

Pan American Open
Wall Street Racquetball Courts
San Francisco, CA

January 18-21

Laurel Open
Oakland, CA

January 23-26

Wayland Open
Cancer Society Open
Wayland, MA

January 25-28

National Men's Indoor Olympic Games Qualifier
Dr Pepper Classic
Pittsburgh, PA

January 28-31

U.S. National Jr. Championships
Newman Park
Oakland, CA

February 1-4

U.S. National Doubles Championship
Rocky Mountain Health Club
Cheyenne, WY

February 8-11

U.S. National Singles Championship
Albuquerque Racquet Club
Albuquerque, NM

February 15-18

U.S. National Mixed Doubles Championship
Racquet Club of Meadville
Meadville, PA

February 22-25

U.S. National Open
Racquet Club of Meadville
Meadville, PA

February 29-3-5

U.S. National Team Championships
Racquet Club of Meadville
Meadville, PA

March 1-4

Pacific Southwest
Sacramento, CA

March 8-11

Southwestern
Dallas, TX

March 15-18

Southeastern
Memphis, TN

March 22-25

Mid-Atlantic
Philadelphia, PA

March 29-31

Far Western
Oakland, CA

April 5-8

Midwest
Cincinnati, OH

April 12-15

New England
Boston, MA

April 19-22

Southeast
Atlanta, GA

April 26-29

Far West
Los Angeles, CA

Dates To Remember

U.S. National Intercollegiate Championships
The Racquet Club, Memphis, TN, April 12-14, 1985

U.S. National Singles Championship
presented by Lite Beer from Miller
(qualifying required in Regionals)
U.S. National Jr. Championships
(qualifying required in Regionals)
Newport Beach Sporting House, Newport Beach, CA, June 22-26

U.S. National Doubles Championships
Rocky Mountain Health Club, Cheyenne, WY, Oct. 24-27

(Continued on page 10)
There was more to do than play racquetball in Quico. Favorite activities included tanning sessions poolside. Visits to the downtown and country markets for bargains; a day at the bullfights, a night at the cockfights; a trip to Miind el Munelo (Middle of the World) where you can straddle the equator and get a certificate to testify to it; view the inside of a volcano that is not too much. The band and the baton contributed to the international winning and goodwill effort.

The pagentry of the opening ceremonies in the sooner field adjoining the Quico Racquet Club was well-touching. The sun was warm, but not too hot. The five digitans spoke, but not too much. The band and the baquet twirler performed, but too long. It was impressive.

Accoecles to Columbia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the United States and an honorable mention to Canada for their distinctive nice and tasteful uniforms.

U.S. Team sponsors, Diversified Products, Lite Beer, and Penn Athletic Products contributed to the international winning and goodwill effort.

**Notebook (continued from page 3)**

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Walter Stenberg, 445-5406

February 9-10
Tournament
The Rudge
1204 North Foothill
Prado, UT 84003
Jrue Taylor
February 9
1st Annual Masters Open (3)
International Athletic Club
391 S. Vacation Way
Aurora, CO 80014
Mike Richardson
February 7-10
Supreme Courts Open
Supreme Courts Racquet & Health
Clubs
4100 Prospect Ave. NE
Aberdeen, ND 57401

February 8
Late 1980 Winter Open
Snowcreek Athletic Club
Marlborough, MA 02056
Rudy Davis
617-934-5011

Tournament
Sanibel Harbor
1501 Magnolia Ave.
St. Petersburg, FL 33705
Richard Gordon
617-466-5435

February 8-10
1985 Winter Open
Snowcreek Athletic Club
Marlborough, MA 02056
Rudy Davis
617-934-5011

Open Tournament (3)
Massachusetts Family Activity Center
P.O. Box 117
Woburn, MA 01801
David Rodriguez. 322-5646

Light Rain Day's Open Massacre (3)
Snowcreek Meadows
5695 Hopkins Rd.
Liverpool, NY 13088
Jim Leatham
Women's 95
M.E.B. Racquetball
754-8077

February 7-10
1985 Winter Open
Snowcreek Athletic Club
Marlborough, MA 02056
Rudy Davis
617-934-5011

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Dee & Roberts Nominated Outstanding AARA Athletes

At the end of each year, THE OLYMPIAN MAGAZINE, published by the United States Olympic Committee, selects the Sports Man and Sports Woman of the Year.

Though not yet a full fledged Olympic sport, racquetball was granted Group C membership by the USOC in 1982, and this year has been invited to submit its outstanding athletes for consideration among all the sports recognized by the USOC.

Alpine skier Tamara McKinney, Lexington, KY, and archer Rick McKinney, Glendale, AZ received their respective awards among all the athletes named in 1985. (They are not related.)

Following is a synopsis of the male and female athletes selected this year by the American Amateur Racquetball Association. The text is by Ian Michaels, fre-lance writer.

MARY DEE
For several years, Mary Emmett Dee physically possessed the elements to become a winner in racquetball. And from time-to-time, she did win. However, between fighting off injuries and working on her mechanics, Dee couldn't put it together.

"Everybody kept asking me 'Why don't you beat those players?' Somewhat doubtful of her abilities, the comment kept running through her mind.

After hours of viewing the professionals in person and on ESPN, she discovered what the victors had in common. In fact, she often was able to pre-select the winners during warm-up or early in the game. Mentally and emotionally, they were prepared and made adjustments when needed.

Welcome 1984 — when Dee's physical attributes were joined by a positive mental attitude and the ability to be intense or relax during a match.

The 29-year-old resident of Weare, NH pulled it all together well enough to capture a string of 18 consecutive tournaments, including the Lite/AARA Regional Championships and Ektelon Regionals. She was third in this year's prestigious American Amateur Racquetball Association U.S. National Singles and finished second in the National Eketelon event.

The crowning achievement for the pretty, curly-haired University of Vermont grad was her number one finish in the individual competition during the International Amateur Racquetball Federation (IARF) World Championships in Sacramento, CA in July. She was a member of Team USA which was undefeated in team competition against 11 other countries in the "Olympics of Racquetball."

This 5'6", 132 pound Dee tucked away her perpetual ear-to-ear grin long enough to defeat Pennsylvanian Cindy Baxter, Team USA captain, whom she hadn't beaten previously.

Dee, who has a degree in physical education, teaches racquetball and is Activities Coordinator at the Manchester (NH) Court Club. One of eight children, Dee hails from St. Louis, MO, the early Mecca of racquetball. Interestingly enough, however, she never played the sport until college.

Her victory in the IARF World Championships earned Dee a spot in World Games II which take place in late July, 1985, in London, England.

ANDY ROBERTS

Long before Andy Roberts won the AARA Intercollegiate Racquetball Championships and lead the Memphis State University to its eighth consecutive national team title this past April, everyone knew he was a force to be reckoned with.

Bearing the bespectacled good looks of a Clark Kent, the 6'3¾", 197 pound Roberts ripped the ball so hard and low that certainly a strip search would reveal an "S" emblazoned on his chest. Surely, only the fabled Kryptonite would slow Roberts down.

Early in the spring he gunned it out with the other 15 best amateurs (many of whom have victories over touring professionals) selected for the East Coast Invitational Tournament in North Carolina and defeated Florida's Sergio Gonzalez in the finals of the round-robin event.

Andrew Edward Roberts was so good that he was expected to win. His number one seeding in the American Amateur Racquetball National Juniors and number three seeding at the DP Nationals in June against the best of all ages proved it. Right?

Wrong. Roberts lost in the quarter-finals of both the Juniors, and at the DP Nationals, for the first time in his tournament life, he lost in the first round.

Emotion, be it anger or depression, surfaced often on and off the court in the 19-year-old.

Roberts' junior title assured him a place on the Team USA that was to compete in the International Amateur Racquetball Federation (IARF) World Championships in July at Sacramento, just up the road from Los Angeles and the site of the Class A Olympic Sports.

But the sobering effect of the two early round defeats and the knowledge that he most likely would be only an alternate on the USA team took a bit of the excitement away from the antics of Roberts. His anger, he came to realize with the help of others, expended much needed energy. It was a cause rather than the effect of losing.

Because of a couple of late developments, Roberts' role went from alternate to the number one player on the men's team.

Roberts displayed a newfound attitude, showed mettle characteristic of a college sophomore and unleashed the latent all know he had in his key position of the team that went undefeated against all comers from 11 other nations in the IARF World Championships.

Even the loss to Canada's Ross Harvey in the finals of the men's individual championship failed to dim the brightness that Roberts displayed. Roberts and Harvey, a former professional, played to a standstill, splitting games in a match that was decided by a 15-14 breaker.

He had helped his team, and most importantly, Roberts learned to relax. Gone was the yelling, screaming, and venting of anger against the referee. "I was taking it too seriously... getting frustrated and bang the racquet against the wall," said the pre-med student. He is attending the University on an athletic scholarship for racquetball.

Of course, Roberts still wants to win and he admits to some anger after a defeat, but the three-sport letterman from Christian Brothers High School in Memphis does the controlling rather than being controlled.

The youngest of four boys, Roberts is a world class competitor who will have a chance to show his class in the World Games II in London next summer as a result of his play in Sacramento. Individual finalists automatically qualified for berths in England.

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