

Flickstein writes own ticket to major honor

Dan Flickstein received the Carl Porter Award for his writing contributions to handball. Here are excerpts from his acceptance speech.

It's been 40 years since I had my first idea for an article, and here I am accepting another award — a great award — for my writing rather than for my playing. While it's very gratifying to see all of you here, I want you to realize how many of you kept me from my real goal — an award for my playing.

But like most of us when we lose, I have an excuse. While you guys were out there practicing, I guess I must have been home writing. And while we were playing, you guys were focused on how to make the shot, while I was concentrating on how to word the shot.

The truth is, I want to thank all the players with whom I have come in contact through competing or observing. Once, in an article, I referred to Avenue P, where I learned to play well, as a “den of iniquity.” I will not retract that. The atmosphere there reeked of gambling and hustling. It fostered cheating and fighting.

But in addition to its evils, it provided a great show starring incredibly colorful characters. I could see games between guys named the “Devil” and “Champ,” “Snowy” and “Deacon,” or “Whitey” and “Slugger” and “Harry No Gloves” and the “Eagle.”

Rising above the antics of these men were occasional great singles and doubles matches featuring now Hall of Famers Ken Davidoff, Howie Eisenberg and Mr. Handball himself, Vic Hershkowitz. I had many intense singles matches there against Bruce Davidoff, seated among us.

Beyond all that was young Steve Sandler, who could play with the very best but who also played circus games. For example, Steve would play two men with only his opposite backhand. Or he'd play a match in which he was not allowed to step on the court. He had to run around its periphery. Or there was the game he played while holding a beach chair in one hand. It's no myth. I saw it! But it was Sandler's serious games that gave me impetus to write my very first article.

Eventually there was so much more that



Flickstein stands at a display describing the rebirth of the USHA under Carl Porter.

stimulated my imagination about the sport we all love. But the following moments stand out most in my recollection:

- The three Oberts in their gleaming white NYAC shirts — and all that power.
- Joe and Charlie Danilczyk outooking and outthinking the best.
- The rebirth of Oscar Obert in the form of Wally Ulbrich.
- The development of the skills of newest one-wall Hall of Famer, quiet Al Apuzzi and, of course, at the same time, the sensational Joe Durso — mouth included.
- The enduring, amazing ability of the little man with a limp to become one of the greatest doubles players ever — Artie Reyer.
- The staying power of Al Torres, who, at 65, with a little makeup, could still enter a juniors tournament.
- The chatter I used to share with Irv “the Mayor” Rosenblatt and Morris Levitsky, the only man I know who wrote “handball referee” on his tax return.
- The rise of the ICHA by, in my opinion, the greatest contributor to one-wall of all time, Paul Williams.
- The many guys with whom I continue to play on Saturdays: Graham Palmore, Tom Vitale, Pete Stefano, Ron Pescatore, Ron Meditz, Marcelo Rodriguez, Steve Rosenberg, Elliot Nadel, Al Torres and many others like Jerry and Danny Yee, Mark Glatzer, Jim Lonano, Tom Hopkins and Stu Kirzner.

I'd like to thank my wife for encourag-

ing me to continue to play in tournaments. About a dozen years ago I told her I was going to stop entering because I couldn't deal with the symptoms of nervousness I experience every year. I expected an approval from my sweet, loving partner. Instead I heard, “Why don't you lie down and die altogether?”

So here I am, a long shot at becoming a Grand Master. Now if only Torres would team up with me for the next four years.

I must also express sincere gratitude to former champion Mark Levine, a man I hope will be in the Hall of Fame shortly, for recognizing my contribution to the sport, for nominating me and for hosting today's festivities.

When I was a kid I played ball for fun. Eventually I began to enjoy the status I was achieving as one of one-wall's better players. In my 20s I realized I had some skill with a pen, but I never realized, while I was writing, that I was helping our sport. I did it for the same reason I played handball, just for fun.

When I learned that I was going to receive the Carl Porter Award, I went back to the August 2007 issue in which Carl Porter discussed how he brought the USHA into a modern age. All of us who have played in USHA-sanctioned events and have enjoyed some notoriety from high finishes and championships, or who simply enjoyed competing under tournament conditions, owe Carl Porter their thanks for bringing the organization from its death-bed back to full, thriving life.

Finally to the USHA itself, and I've said this many times: Your recognition of and participation in one-wall gives credibility to a game that would otherwise remain unorganized and anonymous. It would be just a sport played by thousands of weekend athletes in hundreds of local parks around New York City.

I hope today's young players realize this about the USHA and help our current one-wall commissioner, Howie Eisenberg, to promote one-wall to attain a status I never could have imagined when I was a kid. In August's issue of the magazine I quoted 19-year-old Tyree Bastidas: “One-wall handball belongs in the Olympics.”

Let's aim for that.