

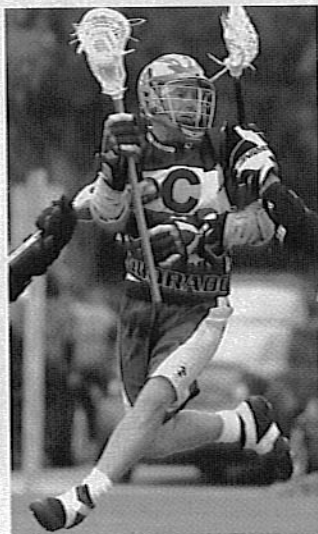
Grandmasters Shining in Florida Classic

THE FLORIDA LACROSSE Classic is not your ordinary tournament. It is held in the midst of winter and is welcomed by the northerners as a well-needed break from the snow and cold. This year was no exception. The tournament is organized by the Florida Youth Lacrosse Foundation, which uses the tournament to fund youth lacrosse programs throughout Florida.

Marc Hoffman's Grandmaster Crease Monkeys won the title for the second year, going 4-0 and only being contested in the title game, which they won over the Xlaxmen, 14-11. The Monkeys scored 61 goals to take the total offense award, and only gave up 22 goals, placing second behind Steve Gillette's Team Colorado, who despite their problems on offense, managed to finish first in the tournament in team defense, giving up only 20 goals.

The tournament has finished its fourth year. Its first year was primarily devoted to developing the tournament and garnering interest in it by the Grandmasters lacrosse population, namely those players who turn 45 or older in the year in which the tournament is held. Whereas only four teams were able to attend in 2002, 16 teams traveled south this year and almost 300 players participated. Two new teams joined the tournament action – the Long Island Jesters and Todd Walker's Wild Hares, comprised mostly of Ohio State alumni and Columbus area players. The Hares fared better in the standings, claiming fifth place after losing on Sunday to Ohio Wesleyan University's Legends.

The last two years, the foundation has managed to accumulate and distribute almost \$15,000 to 10 Florida lacrosse



Jim Henry of Team Colorado goes airborne between two FROGS in a 6-4 loss to the hosts in the 2005 Florida Lacrosse Classic consolation game.

teams: Cardinal Newman High girls and boys, Spanish River High boys, Arthur Myer Academy girls, Ft. Myers High girls, Nova High boys, Cypress Bay girls, Weston Youth Lacrosse Program for boys and the Boca Jets Lacrosse Program for girls and boys. This year, the foundation will net almost \$16,000, so the old players are helping to perpetuate and develop the sport.

Many of the directors of the foundation are former players and some still play for the host FROGS (Florida Real Old Guys), which lost their first game to the new Wild Hares but recovered to win the consolation championship. The directors never stop planning new ideas to keep the tournament entertaining. This year Don Clinton, Brian Clinton, Rich Barba, Greg Lymber, Joe Rusinowski, Jim Landon, Pete Dunne and Gary Smith decided to offer games to those 50 and older by forming a Half-Century Division, based on the response to a half-century game held last year. This division included a round-robin format of shortened games after the tournament games were completed. The purpose was to offer the Grandmaster level players that originated Grandmaster lacrosse back in 1999 the opportunity to play at a slightly lesser competitive level than the current Grandmaster level, which has seen an influx of fast 45-year-old players. The Ohio Wesleyan Legends won the Half-Century title and six teams played to prove that the concept will work. Look for more 50-and-over offerings in other tournaments in the future.

Next year's classic is set for Jan. 20-22, 2006.

—TD Paulius

years, but when none of the local sporting good stores would carry lacrosse equipment, he and a couple of friends started their own home-grown business to make the sport available to everyone.

"He has been a stalwart in our lax community and ran a camp for high school kids in the early '90s," said Larson. "My kid showed up – he may have been in fifth grade – and Hugh took him on despite the age of the other campers. My son, Luke, is now a starting sophomore middie at Kenyon College and thinking about being a prosecutor like Hugh someday."

"Hugh was there in the early days and anyone who played then is seen as an ambassador," added Bissell. "There has been a radical increase in the amount of kids playing lacrosse up here and Hugh helped give the sport its momentum."

Barber enjoys passing along his love of lacrosse to others – in addition to playing – as a spiritual way to pay back the sport and those in it who have helped him arrive at this point in his life. Getting out on the green grass with his friends is also an escape for him from the realities of his day job.

"There is no question that the range of people you meet in the sport can do nothing but strengthen your life and life experience," he said. "There are some lessons you learn playing lacrosse and how you play it and they apply to your life every day."

As life makes its natural progression, some activities must fall by the wayside, and with the advent of his 40th birthday, competitive lacrosse is nearing its end for Barber. The body doesn't recover quite as quickly; the sting of a hard shot off the chest now lingers a couple days more than usual. And those 2 a.m. wake-up calls, with the dead bodies and pictures on the mantel, take a little bit longer to shrug off.

But not quite yet.

"I've been saying for the past five years that I wouldn't play anymore, that this would be my last year," said Barber, who will continue his tournament career with the Crease Monkeys, a squad that has made trips to Perth, Prague and Hawaii. "But then the season rolls around, and I smell the gloves. I just can't imagine not playing."

So he continues to play, stifling attackmen on the field and attackers in court. **LM**