



Jeff Wagner recently won two titles at the Virginia Open racquetball tournament held at the Greenbrier North YMCA. Wagner, 40, of Great Bridge, has competed in racquetball for about 15 years.

DAN COOLEY

# Sport swings into popularity; Va. Open becomes pro tour stop

BY DAN COOLEY  
CORRESPONDENT

Racquetball is making a comeback, and Chesapeake is a big part of it. Last year, when the International Racquetball Tour (IRT) increased to 16 cities, Chesapeake was added to a list that includes stops in Stockton and San Diego, Calif.; Toronto; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Chicago; Boston; and New York. The event, known as the Virginia Open, started 25 years ago as a military-only event sponsored by the U.S. Joint Armed Forces. Over the years it was opened to the public, and last year the IRT sanctioned it as a professional tour stop.

That affiliation continued two weeks ago when the 2006 Virginia Open Racquetball Championships were held at the Greenbrier North YMCA on Old Greenbrier Parkway. Both amateur and professional players competed.

"The players all seem to love it," said Virginia Open event and tournament director Corinne Mastronardi. "There are 18 stops on the tour. You can only miss two or three and very few miss this one. Of the top 24 players, we're only missing one."

About 200 players competed in this year's tournament.

Jeff Wagner, one of the Greenbrier North YMCA's board of directors and a sponsor of the Open, was among the competitors.

Wagner, 40, of Great Bridge,

## VIRGINIA OPEN RESULTS

- (Held April 6 to 9 at Greenbrier North YMCA)
- Men's professional singles: Jack Huczek d. Kane Waselenchuk, 11-2, 11-4, 11-9.
  - Men's open singles: Mitch Williams and Andy Hawthorne, 10.
  - Men's 25 singles: Jeff Wagner d. Jason Imhof.
  - Men's 35 singles: Wagner d. Phillip Pemberton, 15-13, 15-11.
  - Men's 45 singles: Mark Baron d. Daniel Nedd, 15-12, 15-8.
  - Men's 45 BC singles: David Michalek d. Alan Wysl, 15-8, 15-3.
  - Men's 55 singles: Jim Bailey d. Walter Murphy, 13-15, 15-11, 11-6.
  - Men's 65 singles: Lee Mayz won round robin play; Phil Wheeler, 2nd.
  - Men's A singles: Wille Rodriguez d. Doug Miller, 15-14, 15-9.
  - Men's B singles: Deepak Panduranga d. Lance Collier, 15-11, 13-15, 11-8.
  - Men's 24 B/C singles: Chris Fanning d. Kurt Chen, 15-5, 8-15, 11-4.
  - Men's C singles: Brian McHaney d. Chen, 15-3, 15-8.
  - Women's A singles: Malla Bailey d. T.J. Baumhough, 15-2, 15-3.
  - Women's A singles consolation: Laurel Chung d. Allison Dauer by forfeit.
  - Women's B/C singles combined: Janell Wheeler d. Jeanne Noah by forfeit.
  - Women's B/C singles combined consolation: Carrie Hoert d. Denise Berto, 15-4, 11-15, 11-7.
  - Boys' 18 singles: Sharief Lachmansingh d. Rion O'Campo, 8-15, 15-3, 11-7.
  - Boys' 14 singles: Kamal Lachmansingh won round robin play; Kelani Bailey, 2nd.
  - Men's open doubles: Brent Walter/Mitch Williams d. Bryan Crosser/Alejandro Herrera by forfeit.
  - Men's open doubles consolation: Jason Gallop/Dillon Lacoste d. Lorenzo Brookins/Tommy Gladson, 15-8, 15-10.
  - Men's B/C doubles: John Alterberry/Tom Gerhardt d. Collier/Patrick Williams, 13-15, 15-13, 11-6.
  - Mixed open doubles: M. Bailey/Baron d. Cand Hostowich/Corey Frit, 8-15, 15-3, 11-6.
  - Mixed open doubles consolation: Chung/Gallop d. Amy Dais/Pete Toribolini, 15-4, 5-15, 11-9.

has been competing in racquetball for 15 years and played in countless tournaments. He estimated he travels to a tournament about once every six weeks. He would like to do more but now has a higher priority. Two daughters, Rachel, age 13, and Nicole, 12, compete in the Chesapeake Select Soccer League. The two compete on Saturdays and Sundays nine months out of the year, and Wagner rarely misses a game.

He entered this year's racquetball tournament in both the 25 and older and 35 and older men's singles events. Wagner often competes in one singles and doubles tournament, but he opted for the two singles this time.

"You never know if you're going to have a bad day, so I

like to have a backup," Wagner said.

Wagner also competed in the pro draw, winning a qualifying match on the first day, Thursday, to get in. His win placed him in the round of 16 for Friday. Though losing his next match, Wagner showed well. Facing Cliff Swain of Boston, the No. 3-ranked player in the world, Wagner lost a 11-9, 11-3 and 11-8 match.

Swain then advanced to the semifinals, before losing to No. 2-ranked Kane Waselenchuk of Austin, Texas. With just one more match left on this year's pro tour, April 26 in Chicago, No. 1-ranked Jack Huczek of Rochester Hills, Mich., took a commanding lead for that spot

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by downing Waselenchuk in the final at Greenbrier.

Even with the loss to Swain, Wagner had one more match on Friday. Seeded No. 2, he advanced to the 25 and older semifinals with a two-game win over Deepak Panduranga of Chesapeake. Saturday started with a 10 a.m. quarter-final match in the 35 and older division, where Wagner was seeded first. He struggled but prevailed over Gary Holland of Glen Allen, 15-11 and 15-13.

Wagner finished off with two more matches, both in the 25 and older group. He moved into the championship match with a two-game win over Michael Isbell of Chesapeake at 2 p.m. The finals took place at 10 p.m. There, Wagner upset No. 1 Jason Imhof of Arlington.

Next up was a 9 a.m. Sunday morning semifinal in the 35 and older division. Wagner then advanced to a 4 p.m. final with a two-game win over Steve Conn of Cary, N.C. Wagner picked up his second title with a hard fought 15-11, 15-13

win over third-seeded Phillip Pemberton of Alexandria.

Wagner regularly shuns publicity and pointed out there are plenty of other good players in the North Greenbrier club, many who are better than him. Just the same, it was a special tournament for Wagner.

"I had won a doubles and single or mixed doubles and single before, but not two singles," Wagner said. "It was a real good weekend and a lot of fun."

The weekend was also special for the Lachmansingh family of Great Bridge, with two teens winning titles.

Sharief, 18, won the boys' 18 and under singles. He defeated Rion O'Campo, 8-15, 15-3 and 11-7. Kamal, age 12, won the boys' 14 and under singles by going unbeaten in round-robin play. The boys' father, Kim, also competed, but lost in the quarterfinals in men's open doubles and men's A singles.

"I lost a tough one (15-10, 15-12 in singles), but the boys did great," Kim said. "The three of us really enjoy racquetball, and we love to compete in it. My wife recently started playing so she would have an idea what we're talking about at the dinner table."