

Greenbrier North Y's new junior team goes national

By Dan Cooley
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During the 1980s, racquetball caught on with the baby boomer generation and became one of the nation's fastest growing sports. Just as quickly, the sport's popularity declined.

Now, it seems, racquetball is seeing a resurgence of interest.

"There is a big grouping of 40-plus players, a mingling of those in their 20s and 30s and now a fairly large number of youth," said baby boom racquetball player Carter Green.

That trend has led Green and others to form a junior racquetball squad at the Greenbrier North YMCA. The team, boasting 13 members aged 9 to 17, recently returned from a trip to the junior nationals in Tempe, Ariz.

Six of the players are from Chesapeake: sophomore Jesse Taylor of Indian River High; brothers Sha-



Members of the Greenbrier North YMCA junior racquetball team include, front row: Warren Bailey; middle row, from left: Kelani Bailey, Rion Ocampo and Maura Durso; back row: Courtney Green, Jesse Taylor, John Baird and Richard Blanchette. Not pictured: Daniel Kriparos, David Kriparos, Shareif Lachmansingh, Kamal Lachmansingh and Stephen Fenton.

reif Lachmansingh, a senior at Oscar Smith High, and Kamal, an eighth-grader at Greenbrier Middle; broth-

ers Daniel Kriparos, a freshman at Grassfield High, and David, a sixth-grader at Hickory Middle; and John

Baird Jr., an eighth-grader at Greenbrier.

Green serves as an assistant coach for the team. Norfolk native Malia Bailey is the head coach. She is a Wilson Racquetball national spokesperson and has won 26 national titles and six world titles.

The 13 junior racquetball team members are required to attend twice-monthly practices and to keep up their skill level in order to compete in the four local racquetball tournaments Greenbrier North hosts each year. That also means a lot of practice on their own.

David Kriparos tried several different sports, including hockey, but racquetball remains his favorite. He was given the team award for most enthusiastic.

Baird received the most-improved award. He picked up the sport 18 months ago, through encouragement from his father. The two of-

See RACQUETBALL, Page 22

Continued from Page 20

ten played racquetball together, until Dad was recently deployed overseas. Now, Baird Jr. is teaching racquetball to his mother.

"It's a great game because there are a lot of interactive skills involved," Baird said. "And it's good for any kid to play instead of spending time playing video games."

Courtney Green, a freshman at Ocean Lakes High and the daughter of assistant coach Green, said she likes the game because it's a good stress reliever. She can hit the ball as hard as she wants, though she also enjoys controlling where she hits it and how hard.

Though the junior racquetball team is just 10 months old, it already has made some noise. Five of the 13 players competed at junior nationals, with four placing. Kelani Bailey, an eighth-grader at Ghent School and coach Bailey's daughter, won the 12-and-under national crown.

Also placing were Kelani's

younger brother, Warren Bailey, a third-grader at Ghent. He finished third in the 8-and-under boys singles. Kamal Lachmansingh earned second place in the boys 14-and-under red division. Lachmansingh also joined teammate Rion Ocampo, a junior at Warwick High, to finish third overall in the boys doubles 14-and-under.

Shareif Lachmansingh competed in the boys 18-and-under division.

"Our kids surprised a lot of people. No one knew who they were," Bailey said. "They all did great, and I was really proud of them."

Bailey said she would like to take as many as 10 players next year to junior nationals, but money is an issue. The players do a lot of fundraising. Last year, the Commonwealth of Virginia Racquetball Club paid for each youth's \$100 entry fee.

For more information about the junior racquetball club, call Tariq Robinson at the Greenbrier North YMCA at 366-9622.

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