

# Ready, willing is Aber

By Geoff T. Capell

In the early 1950s, Bob Kendler broke away from the turmoil of the AAU and formed the U.S. Handball Association. It was a bold move, for players going with Kendler were automatically excommunicated from the AAU.

But Kendler wanted to give back to handball, the sport he so loved. He was a good player. Even more than that, he was an exceptional visionary who did more for handball than perhaps anyone.

The R.W. Kendler Award is given each year to other visionaries and contributors to handball who share his passion. One such visionary, and the winner of the Kendler Award for 2005, is Sol Aber.

Aber started playing one-wall before high school with the “pinkie” during the ’30s in the Bronx against old Yankee Stadium. Every Sunday a group played sweepstakes, an all-day affair costing a dollar, winner take all. Aber won between \$40 and \$60 each Sunday, more money than his dad made in a week of work during the Depression.

Aber then attended Dewitt-Clinton High School in the Bronx, where he lettered in handball. After college and a tour of duty in the Army during World War II, he moved to San Jose, where he joined the San Jose YMCA. He became an outstanding right-side open doubles player.

He loved the Bay Counties League, in which he played against archrivals Dan Marbel, Bob Brady and Gene McAteer from the Olympic Club. He won several local and

state titles and has won 18 national titles—and still counting—which has made him a USHA Grand Master.

Aber also is one of only three members of the Northern California Handball Hall of Fame as a contributor as well as a player.

His credentials as a player speak for themselves, but his contributions to handball greatly surpass his playing achievements.

As a player on and off the court, Aber was never shy about telling his opponents what he was going to do to them. At the same time, behind the scenes, he was running tournaments, never bragging—though maybe he should have.

He has been running tournaments for more than 40 years. Eighty-year-old Rudy Stadlberger put it best when he said, “Sol was putting me on the courts at the San Jose Open when I was a young man.”

Among his other contributing accomplishments, Aber reinstated the handball program at San Jose State, where he volunteers his time teaching one night a week. He also has reintroduced the San Jose State Handball Club.

Aber is a member of the San Jose YMCA handball committee, a keeper of the Hall of Fame presentation at the Y and the leader of the rededication of the courts to a longtime enthusiast, the late Ray Blackmore, ex-San Jose police chief. Aber is in the process of reinstating handball in the East Side Union High School District and making a handball video on fundamentals, using unique techniques and philosophies.

But in the last five years, he has totally



Estelle Aber with longtime husband Sol.

dedicated his life to handball service, specifically in the area of teaching, of which he is most proud. In Aber’s generation, players did not show others anything about the game for fear they would use it against them. But Aber was always showing anyone who asked how they could improve.

He comes from a family of teachers. His grandfather was a rabbi and his mother a teacher. Aber says it just runs in the family. He feels he has an eye for analysis.

Aber’s approach to teaching is unique. He coaches everyone individually. If the player wants to win tournaments, Aber goes in that direction. If the player just wants to have fun and hit the ball, he goes in that direction. Most important, he stresses good fundamentals, having fun and coming out of the court a better person.

Aber picks his spots wisely. If the student wants to learn, he attacks. If he wants to be left alone, he backs off. Improvement is most important, spirits must be high, and he knows a big hug is always appreciated.

He also believes one has to teach players how to win, which is easier said than done. He is also not afraid to talk to the kids about life and where they are going.

Aber’s classroom is Court 2 at the San Jose YMCA. His students are kids and adults ranging in age from 7 to 70. He teaches at 3 p.m. every Friday and gives drop-in lessons on a daily basis. Among his high-profile students is open player Ricardo Diaz, along with junior national champions Sam Kass, Crystal Diaz, Eric Campbell and Tom Linnik and runner-up Bob Schooler. Aber also travels with his kids to national tournaments to give them coaching and support.

He says handball is much more than The Perfect Game—it kept him alive. Two bouts with leukemia in 1969 and ’92 would have been fatal to the average person, but Aber’s doctors say it was handball that saved his life. His contributions to handball make him deserving of the Kendler Award.

Kendler Award winner Aber has dedicated himself to spreading the gospel of handball to young players.

