

AI Tomba

AI Tomba's introduction to handball began in Astoria, Queens, when he was thirteen years old.

Like many players of the middle 1950's, he began with the pink Spaulding. He played briefly with the small, black ball for his high school team.

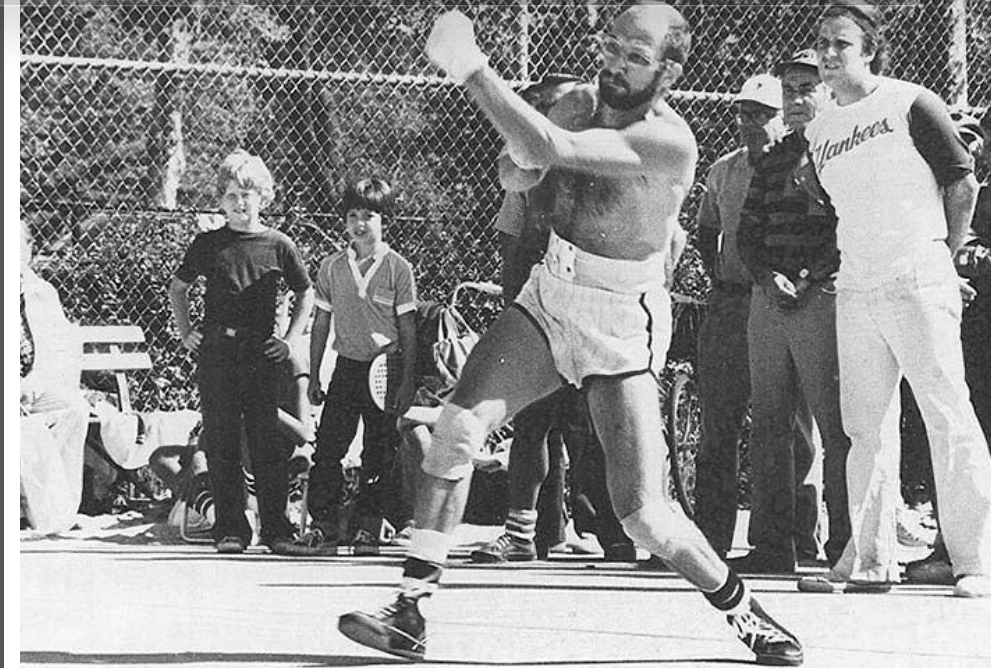
After his family moved from Astoria to Jackson Heights, Queens, AI took the next step of his handball education. He often had to wait until later in the day to get into a game because he was just out of his teens, and many of the men at the local park were seasoned players with decades of experience. He also furthered his handball education in Brooklyn, where at the Hebrew Educational Society in Brownsville he faced superior competition.

Once married and living in Washington Heights in Manhattan, AI changed his handball location to Central Park. But by then he was capable of competing with top players, some of whom eventually became National Hall of Famers. Following that he played in Sunnyside, the "Hill" in Maspeth, and then in Fresh Meadows, disparagingly referred to as "Psycho Park."

Many weekends AI would travel to Rockaway Beach where he played until dark, first singles, then doubles. Games were interspersed with dips in the ocean, which replenished his already seemingly tireless body. Less frequently he traveled to Coney Island to play.

After winning several NY State and local singles and doubles titles in the 1970's, and two National Masters Doubles titles in the '80's, AI's participation in all tournaments became considerably less frequent. Although not possessed of power or a strong serve, Tomba's

PLAYERS OF DISTINCTION



success, including defeating several players of renown, was attributed to his superb conditioning, a dogged determination and competitive spirit. Tomba played into his 70's without an ounce of unnecessary fat on his body.

His interest in handball, interaction with other players, and pure love of the game inspired him to write an article, which was published in Handball Magazine in February, 1999. He also collaborated with Dan Flickstein on an article about Avenue P style handball in Brooklyn. AI's artistic talents enabled him to create cartoons suggesting the antics, the games, and the shenanigans that went on during weekend handball at Avenue P. The work was featured in Handball in December, 2004.

At this writing AI has not entered a tournament in approximately ten years. But at 76 years of age with two knees replaced, he continues to play in local parks, and he continues to love the game and to respect those who play it.