

Kevin Kilgallen



Kevin began playing 1-wall “pink ball” at the park across the street from Midwood High School in Flatbush, Brooklyn.

He was encouraged by Ken Gamble, who was creating what he called a “handball movement.” Ken was working diligently at encouraging hundreds of young people at parks and schoolyards throughout Brooklyn to learn the game. At Midwood Park, he committed dozens of players of kids to learn and compete.

Ken and Kevin decided to switch to “black ball” and begin the Flatbush Handball Club. Many of the players, of all age groups included at least two dozen who went on to compete in the 1-wall USHA and AAU Nationals. The earlier group included Gamble himself, Wally Ulbrich, and Ken Holmes. Many nationally ranked players from all over the city began to play at Midwood and represent the Flatbush Handball Club in various exhibitions and team events. This included visits to West Point numerous times to play against the Academy’s Officers Club Team, which Kevin helped develop. The Academy’s Cadet Varsity Handball Team reciprocated by playing 4-wall against the Flatbush team several times at the Brooklyn Central YMCA. Matches were also organized between the West Point officers and the New York Athletic Club players, some at West Point, some at the NYAC.

A few years before Irv Ehrlich retired from contributing to handball, he asked both Ken Gamble and Kevin to join the National 1-Wall Committee. Gamble was unable to accept because he was inundated with his work helping young players. But Kevin became such an integral part that on Ehrlich’s retirement, Irv and the Committee selected Kevin to be One-Wall Handball Chairman and National One-Wall Tournament Director. Within a brief time President and founder of the USHA Bob Kendler and USHA Executive Director Mort Leve offered Kevin the title of One-Wall Commissioner, which he proudly accepted.

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One of Kevin's happiest moments was running a farewell dinner for Ehrlich. It was attended by approximately 25 of Irv's closest friends and supporters at Michele's Restaurant at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn. President Kendler, at Kevin's request, showed up as a surprise guest. Despite a heavy rainstorm in Chicago, which closed the airport, Kendler made it to the festivities while it was in its third hour. He presented a wonderful speech about Irv, which filled the first two pages of the very next edition of Ace Magazine.

Kevin ran the National 1-Wall for seven years. The venue was shifted to the Flatbush YMCA, then, finally, to Brighton Beach Baths. After Irving Rosenblatt passed on, the Committee was no longer granted permission to use the courts at the Baths, partially because a developer was planning to close and build houses on the facility.

With the quiet support of a few close assistants, Mickey Blechman, Morris Levitsky, Ugo Bontempo, and Marvin Greenberg, Kevin searched for another venue. The Parks Department refused to grant permits for official use of the Coney Island courts.

The Committee, with the help of Ken Gamble, decided to move the National Tournament to various spots: one year in Orangeburg, New York, the next at Queens College, then to the outdoor courts at Brooklyn College. It was essential to do something to reverse the decline 1-wall was facing.

Kevin turned mostly to 4-wall events after that disappointing experience. For two years he and Vic Hershkowitz helped run the NYAC 4-wall annual event. In those days it was the most important weekend invitational handball tournament in America. During this time Kevin also directed two Hall of Fame handball dinners, one for Arty Reyer, the other for Joel Wisotsky.

Sometime later, the USHA requested of Kevin to run the Women's International Classic, with the proviso that he and Rosemary Bellini recruit at least twelve highly ranked players. They were also required to raise \$5,000 for operating expenses. Forty-eight players from eleven states, four Canadian provinces, Mexico, and Ireland entered! And \$48,000 was raised. All players who travelled 200 miles were given \$400 for travel expenses. All players received shirts with their names and representations stitched on them. The top eight finishers were awarded prize money and beautiful sweat shirts.

The following year the tournament grew. Sixty-six players entered and \$66,000 was raised. Also the pro-tour, which always charged the host club for its appearance, requested to take part – free of cost!

Mickey Blechman declared that the three greatest developers of eastern area handball were Charlie O'Connell, Irv Ehrlich, and Kevin Kilgallen. Kevin, however, added Mickey's own name to that rare group of people, making it a foursome.

Yet another important handball event which Kevin ran was broadcast on Fox News, Channel 5. The program focused at least thirty minutes of handball at Sportset in Rockville Center, Long Island. It included not only play, but interviews of Paul Williams as well as at least twenty other players there for the day.

Kevin's induction into the NY-HOF came at the same time as his induction to the Holy Cross College Athletic Hall of Fame, where he was honored for his track and field weight-throwing accomplishments and for his coaching at West Point.