

Gil Hendler



Gil was a teenager when he became active in handball. In those years, the 1950's, the AAU was the organization that recognized 1-wall handball.

All matches back then were two out of three 21 point games. There was no tie-breaker. White was the required color of attire for all contestants. There was a nominal fee to enter a National 1-Wall Tournament. It was enough to cover only balls and medals for the top three finishers. The AAU demanded local management to submit all entry fees to them. Hendler personally called and argued with them against this procedure because without sponsors there would be no money to run the event. When the USHA welcomed 1-wall, it required only a membership fee from each player. Local management received donations and recruited some sponsors. This allowed trophies and money to be awarded to tournament winners and high place finishers. Some of the funding went to the support of local programs for deserving teenagers. This went on for years with an increased number of boys and girls entering 1-wall tournaments and being subsidized to play in 4-wall events.

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Hendler assisted in producing handball exhibitions held at the Brownsville Boys Club. Admission was charged and the proceeds went to the Whirlaway paraplegic traveling wheelchair athletes. Exhibitions were held annually for this worthy cause. The Brownsville Boys Club was also the site of the annual USHA National 1-Wall Championships. With over a hundred singles entries, the first few rounds of play consisted of one 25 point game. Anyone winning three rounds received a trophy. Seeded players received two sometimes three byes. This enabled weaker players to succeed among their peers, and to win a trophy before meeting stronger competition. This was a tournament within a tournament. Later on National events included A, B, and C divisions.

Gil was active in making draws and refereeing many matches. In addition he spent countless hours of preparation including the processing of tournament applications. He did this for approximately forty years. In addition to more than a hundred singles entries, there were several other categories: Seniors (age 35+), Masters Doubles (one player at least 40 with partner at least 45), Golden Singles (age 50+). There were categories for men 60+, and even 70+. Gil particularly enjoyed scheduling the times for the matches and seeding the draws. Sometimes players entered several events and time had to be spaced for them to be able to play in each one.

As part of a four man committee which included Irving Rosenblatt, Mickey Blechman, and Morris Levitsky, Gil helped negotiate with Hy Cohen, Manager of Brighton Beach Baths, to hold the National AAU 1-Wall Tournament in that venue. The AAU Nationals were held there in 1971, '72, and '74. After the AAU bowed out of 1-wall and the USHA rebounded from financial difficulties, the USHA Nationals were played at Brighton Beach Baths in 1979 and '80. Hendler was on hand all those years giving his time to what he enjoyed most – 1-wall handball.

Gil became 1-Wall Commissioner, a position he retained for several years. During those years he continued to referee matches among the top players as well as those who were up and coming.

At this writing Gil Hendler is retired and living in Florida. He now plays 4-wall. But he still contributes by reserving court time for all the players. He is also contacted by visitors to Florida who are seeking handball games, not only in 4-wall but in 1-wall as well. It remains his role to help people get involved – something he did nearly all his life in New York, but on a grander scale.