

Morris Franco



Morris Franco started playing handball at the age of 12. He played like a 12 year old until he joined the Air Force at the age of 17.

At 23 he left the local courts at Claremont Park and became a regular at Crotona Park. Crotona Park was a handball haven with some of the best players of the era in both black ball and pink ball. This was where he developed his game, and began to appreciate what a great sport handball is. His game quickly improved because of the wide field of skilled players to compete against. By the late '60's he also played frequently at the Village Courts in Manhattan and at Avenue P in Brooklyn. In the middle 1960's he began entering USHA and AAU blackball handball tournaments in order to play against top players even though his skills with that ball were not strong. He was usually defeated early, but one year he did earn a trophy in Brownsville for winning three rounds of competition. He was much more successful with a pink ball.

He reached his peak in pink ball in his mid-twenties, around the middle of the 1960's, and was an "A" player for about four or five years. The best part of his game was his serve, which may have been the best pink ball serve in handball – ever! He earned runner-

up position in the USHA National Singles Pink Ball Tournament in the early '70's, losing to Al Torres in the semi-finals. Franco got to that round by beating all of his opponents on the outdoor courts of the Brownsville Boys Club. But the semi-final matches were played indoors where his footing was not secure. He shorted out thirty to forty times in the match. Even so the match went to three games. That summer Franco played Torres outside in a park game and easily defeated him. The previous year Franco defeated the number one seed, Raphael Santiago, but lost to another top player, Louis (Chino) Torres, 19-21. Franco believed, and many agreed, that for a few years, outside of Steve Sandler, he was the best pink ball player alive! Twice he was invited to exhibit his skills to a thousand people at the Day of Stars in Brownsville.

Eventually Morris Franco was determined to give back to the game which gave him so much enjoyment. He began to run tournaments at various parks in the Bronx. His successes enabled him to be invited to join the USHA 1-Wall Committee. Along with Tony Quintero he ran the pink ball division of the Nationals for several years. When the pink ball became extinct by the early '80's, because the Spaulding Company stopped producing the ball, he began to run "big blue" events, a game he continues to promote as of this writing. In addition he established a web site about the Big Blue Tournament entitled "Handball '85."