

Bob Sparrow

Bob Sparrow's love of handball originated in his very early years

He would accompany his Dad, Sid Sparrow, on weekends to watch him play at many of the courts throughout Brooklyn. By his mid-teens Bob was developing into a pretty good, very speedy competitor.

After high school, he studied both as an undergraduate and at the law school at Columbia University. During those years he won the "All University" championship in both singles and doubles, four years running (1954-'57). He represented Columbia in many intercollegiate tournaments and exhibitions.

In 1957-'58 Bob began to compete in USHA and AAU sponsored National Tournaments – both in singles and doubles. In doubles he partnered for the first two years with his father. Thus they were partners in the Courts and on the courts. In those years Bob was invited to participate in several Night of Stars exhibitions at the Brownsville Boys Club, playing with and against such legends as Vic Hershkowitz, the Obert brothers, Irv Kirzner, Davey Norvid, and the Danilczyk brothers among others.

In approximately 1957, Bob played in the New York Daily Mirror City Championships, and he won the Queens Singles title. Over the next 30 – 40 years Bob competed in national tournaments yearly. For many years Mike Dikman and Bob Sparrow made a formidable righty-lefty combination, generally fighting deep into the draw.

To commemorate the close of the '64 – '65 World's Fair, an invitational tournament was held to dedicate the newly constructed handball courts at Flushing Meadows. Bob recalls

PLAYERS OF DISTINCTION



Hershkowitz, Wally Ulbrich, and many other top players at this event. However, teamed with Joe Rispoli, and playing the left side, Bob and Joe emerged the winners – and Bob retained the gold watch to prove it!

As the years progressed Bob, while becoming a successful criminal defense attorney, continued to participate in Senior and then Masters National Tournaments, playing at Brighton Beach Baths, Surf Avenue, etc. He took at least one second place in Masters Doubles, losing in the finals to Ronny Berkowitz and his partner.

Bob also played at the Queens Elks Club; at least seven first place trophies adorn his shelves from that competition.

Most significant is that for almost 60 years, Bob played virtually every weekend with the friends he made on the handball courts of NYC. He fondly recalls meeting Mike Dikman, Ray Gershon, and Julie Stack, and shoveling snow off the beloved court in order to play. And after ten minutes, they would strip to shorts in below freezing weather and feel as warm as toast.

Bob would often sneak out of his office early to meet Marty "The Farmer" at Coney Island, where their singles battles were epic. They generally split their matches. In 1974 at Brighton Beach Baths Bob played in the finals of the first AAU Masters Singles event. His opponent was "The Farmer." After splitting the first two games, tournament management felt it was too dangerous for "older" players to continue in the 90+ degree heat. A coin toss decided the championship. It was a first and last for any masters play.

Eventually health issues forced Bob, reluctantly, to pack up his gloves at age 70, ten years prior to this writing. He truly thought he'd be able to play "forever."