

Sports

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local notes



(TH Photo by Craig Melvin)
DON WILCOX with his metal collection from tossing iron

Donald Wilcox was born in Olean N.Y. on December 31, 1924. He was married to Catherine Lyke in June 1950, and is the father of 6 children.

Don has been active in various sports and activities in and around Olean N.Y. for past 29 years. Don has been active in horseshoes since boyhood and has participated in local and area leagues and tournaments for the past 15 years. He has promoted and helped install 2 different horseshoe parks and leagues in the Olean area in the past 6 years. He is an active member and past president (1987) of the Enchanted Mountain Horseshoe Club and Don also belongs to the Yuma, Arizona Horseshoe Club. Don has attended 4 World Horseshoe Tournaments and has competed in each one. They are as follows: 1981- Genola, Minn; 1983 Statesville, N. Carolina; 1984 Huntsville, Alabama; and 1985- Lafayette, Ind. where Don placed 3rd in Men's Class I, section I Division and received a Trophy. Don has also participated in various other tournaments such as New York State, Eastern Nationals; Valley of the Sun, Mesa Arizona; (2 Years) at Tucson, and (4) years at Yuma Arizona.

Besides Horseshoes, Don has been active in other various sports and activities for young people for the past 28 years, including: Organization and running of the Boy Scouts for 10 years; Commissioner and coach of the North Olean Farm League baseball for 4 years; Coach of the 5th & 6th grade boy's basketball team for 2 years; and Organizer and Past President and active member of the Olean High School 41,42 Football Club for 37 years; and is an Honorary Life Member of the New York State Congress Of Parent Teachers.

Don is also a veteran of the U.S. Navy and member of the American Legion Post #892. In spite of having a sight handicap which leaves him legally blind in one eye, Don has managed to pitch and maintain a 35 to 45 percent average in horseshoes. His other hobbies include; Fishing hunting, traveling and reading about the History of our country.

Because of all these worthy qualifications: myself and the Enchanted Mt. Horseshoe Club of Olean N.Y. submit the name of Donald Wilcox for the induction into the N.Y.S. Horseshoe Hall of Fame

Thank you, Bob Hayes

April 17, 1991

N.Y.S. Horseshoe Pitchers Hall Of Fame Committee:

Gentlemen,

We are respectfully submitting Donald Wilcox as a nominee for the New York State Horseshoe Pitchers Hall Of Fame again this year. Enclosed please find a newspaper article on Don from our local newspaper of August 13, 1990. Along with Don's other numerous accomplishments which the committee has received in his resume from the past two years, he is again the President of the Enchanted Mountain Horseshoe Club. Don has brought a lot of horseshoe recognition to the Olean area and South Western New York State. He devotes a tremendous amount of time and energy promoting and playing horseshoes throughout the area. Because of his accomplishments and talents to this sport we feel Don Wilcox should without a doubt be elected into the New York State Horseshoe Pitchers Hall Of Fame in 1991 at Falconer N.Y.

Thank you for this consideration

Respectfully submitted,


Robert Hayes

Vision woes no handicap for this horseshoe champ

By JIM MELARO

Times Herald Sports Writer

Tossing a ton of iron 40 feet sounds like the work of a hulking steel worker and probably not very much fun.

But it is to Don Wilcox.

On the fourth of this month, Wilcox was crowned the Men's Intermediate



Class 'C' winner at the 1990 World Horseshoe Pitching Tournament in Stone Mountain, Ga.

Not bad for a man who was legally blind nine years ago.

"I USED TO hit 50 to 60 percent ringers all the time," said Wilcox, "but I've lost a lot of sight.

"I had blood vessels break in my retina and right now, I'm legally blind on this side," he noted, pointing to his left eye. "I have 20/60 vision on (the right) side."

After competing, and getting handily beaten, in the Genola, Minn. World Tournament in 1981, Wilcox, a retired Olean High School stock clerk, was bothered by his effort.

"That's when I decided it was getting bad. Leading up to the tournament that year, I would get up at night and go to the bathroom and my wife Catherine said I should walk to the bathroom without the light on . . . just in case.

"Sometimes, I would go out on my (horseshoe) pits in the back yard and blindfold myself and try to pitch.

"I figured if it ever came to that, I'd better be ready for it.

"BUT AFTER THAT tournament, I was frustrated. I got beat in all 10 of my matches. So I looked for medical assistance."

Wilcox's cure began with 80 milligrams of prednisone (a drug stronger but similar in use to cortisone) daily as prescribed by physicians in Olean and Buffalo.

"When I first went to the doctor," explained Wilcox, "he found a lot of blood in the back of my eye so the prednisone helped clear that up. After about two weeks, my eyes started to clear up.

"Then I had to have laser surgery. I got 1,000 shots (of laser) in each eye and finally, it was just a matter of taking me off the prednisone. That took about a year. It's real strong stuff. It made my face swell up real bad. That was a long year but, thank God, my vision is saved."

AND THOUGH the year dragged by, Wilcox has been able to get back into the swing of his sport.

"It still bothers me when the sun is

shining real bright or when there are shadows on the stake, but I just have to concentrate," noted Wilcox. "But then, concentration is one of the three keys to success in this sport.

"First, you make sure you're lined up properly. Second, when you deliver, you have to focus on putting the shoe on the stake. You make a mental picture of the shoe going on the stake. And third, when you let go of the shoe, you have to make sure you have it going upwards.

"It's a lot like bowling, getting the right rotation on the shoe so it will hit the stake at the right angle."

GETTING BACK to that ton of iron

"Competing in a tournament like the World event isn't the easiest thing," admitted Wilcox, "especially when you realize that I was the oldest competitor in my class.

"You go head-to-head in round-robin play against everybody in your class (10 pitchers competed in the Class 'C' event) and the winner is decided by total points.

"I finished tied in points with two other guys, but I had the highest percentage of ringers, so they played against each other and then I played the winner."

Finally, after tossing the 2.8-pound shoes against 10 opponents, Wilcox was declared champion by the slimmest of margins . . . one point.

"It's no different than any other sport," said Wilcox. "When it comes down to this, you're facing the very best people. One mistake, and you become a spectator in a hurry.

"I threw an awful lot of shoes that day, and I'll be honest, my arm started to get tight after awhile.

"If I was maybe 10 or 15 pounds heavier, I could probably pitch with a little more consistency."

STILL, the 5-7, 145-pound Wilcox stands tall in his sport.

Winner of eight sanctioned titles, Wilcox is somewhat of a pioneer in the sport in the Olean area.

"I helped organize the Enchanted Mountain League," he noted, "and I worked with (Dave) Forney in getting the pits built on Wayne Street and at Franchot Park.

"Horseshoes is a very competitive sport around here. Some of the best pitchers around come to Olean to compete.

"Look at it this way, I have eight sanctioned wins and now a World title under my belt and I have yet to win the league title."

But the lack of a local championship does little to diminish Wilcox's drive to be the best.

"I come out here and throw 100 shoes every night," said Wilcox. "I try to hit 50 percent ringers.

"Last night I was down a little bit," he quipped. "I only hit 49."