

Racquetball gains popularity

By Heather Rule

Staff writer

Pop! The sound of the little blue ball echoes as it ricochets throughout the racquetball court. These consecutive bursts of sound can be heard Wednesday nights in the Coughlan Field House as intramural racquetball players come together to have a good time playing the game.

Alumnus Jorge Suaruz is a big reason why racquetball is gaining popularity at St. Thomas. For a while, Suaruz ran a couple of racquetball tournaments a year; the intramural play evolved from these tournaments.

Suaruz continues to help out the intramural players when they need it and teaches them how to improve their game. Players are able to get nice equipment and racquets because Suaruz is sponsored by Head, a sports equipment manufacturer.

"Jorge's always offering to help people with their game," junior Jacob Nuxoll said.

Intramural racquetball started last spring. With a fairly relaxed atmosphere, students gathered to form a league where they played each other and ended the year with a playoff. Last spring, the league consisted of about 40 people; now the league is split into two divisions based on skill level.

The increasing number of racquetball players and the sport's popularity has grown through word of mouth on campus. Friends play with each other, they teach other friends, and before you can bat an eye racquetball has claimed a handful of new players.

"It kinda spiders out," junior John Hennek said.

Many of the players are new to the game and had not played racquetball before coming to St. Thomas. The experienced players are more than willing to teach beginners the basics of the game. If someone wants to learn, junior Eric Barahona, Nuxoll or Suaruz are there to teach and help players with their game.

"You're learning and you're coaching at the same time," Barahona said. "You just play. You're constantly learning from your opponent."

A number of players have a background in tennis, which can be beneficial when it comes time to try racquetball, since the two sports are similar. Tennis players who are new to racquet-



JESS SMITH/THE AQUIN

Juniors Jacob Nuxoll (front) and Eric Barahona play racquetball Wednesday nights in the O'Shaughnessy courts on North Campus.

ball seem to pick it up fast, Nuxoll said.

Right now, the games are casual, with just Wednesday night games. Barahona and Nuxoll said that more players will flock toward the courts in the winter, when playing indoors is more favorable. Both of them said that not many people want to go indoors to play a sport in the fall.

Regular players have hit somewhat of a plateau in improving their game. While they have fun playing against friends and fellow students, some players are looking for more variety in competition. If they keep playing the same people over and over again, they will be able to figure out their opponent's game and improving becomes quite difficult.

A positive factor for the players is that racquetball is a great way to stay in shape. Having fun and getting good exercise at the same time is something many players can agree is a good thing.

"It's really, really good exercise," Nuxoll said. "It keeps me in excellent shape."

Sophomore Bill Tehan started playing racquetball last year. He, like many, came from a tennis background and knew little about racquetball when he started. Nuxoll showed Tehan the ropes of racquetball and his game continued to improve each time he stepped onto the court.

"Everyday I was getting better," Tehan said.

Whether the sport continues to grow in numbers on campus is not the most important con-

cern on the minds of players. The attendance is slowly on the rise, but just having some fun with other racquetball players is enough to keep guys coming back each week.

"Most of us are pretty content with the Wednesday league," Hennek said.

The players are hoping that they will get a chance to play other schools soon and they are organizing tournaments to play against new players.

Racquetball's popularity is growing and those involved hope it will continue to attract new students and faculty.

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JON HAUER/THE AQUIN

Sophomore Ben Jensen takes a swing at golf practice Oct. 10. Although the team played well, they did not reach their goals this fall and hope to turn things around in the spring.

Golf team anticipates spring season

By Craig Tacheny

Staff writer

The St. Thomas men's golf team wrapped up the first half of its season last weekend, and they have plenty to build on for the second half.

The Tommies closed out the fall season last weekend at the Twin Cities Classic, taking fifth place out of 18 teams. The team plays a split season and will resume play in the spring.

"Overall, we had an average season," interim coach Dave Lepp said. "We played consistent all fall, but never shot the real low scores."

Contributing most to their consistent play was junior John Treacy, Lepp said.

"John was our most consistent golfer," Lepp said, "almost always shooting in the 70s."

Treacy said that being a senior and having "a lot of tournament experience" has been the key to his success this year.

"The summer competition has really helped too," he said. "You get to play against a lot of older guys and the young hot shots from high school. The competition is real good."

The team's best showings of the year were at the Augsburg Invitational, where they placed second out of 10 teams with a team score of 599 and at the Eau Claire Invitational, where they took fifth out of 15 teams by shooting 601.

At the MIAC tournament, the Tommies took fourth place with a team score of 922 for the 54-hole event. A finish this low was not what the team expected when they started the season.

"One of our goals at the beginning of the year was to win the conference tournament," senior Jon Lundeen said. "Finishing fourth was well below our expectations."

Lundeen said some players haven't played as well as they are capable of playing so far and that is part of why the team has been as Lepp said, "average."

"Justin Lorence has had a tough go this fall, and so have I," Lundeen said. "Hopefully we'll do well [at the Twin Cities Classic]."

There have been some bright spots among some

of the minor disappointments for the Tommies this season. One of them has been the play of freshman Dieter Zuehlke.

Lepp said Zuehlke has been "a pleasant surprise" for the team.

"He [shot the lowest score] for our team at Eau Claire and second lowest to John Treacy at the conference tournament," Lepp said.

Zuehlke said he expected to play as a freshman and knew that he was going to have to be at his best this fall.

"I knew that I was going to have to prove myself to the older guys," Zuehlke said.

Lundeen added that sophomore Ben Jensen also has exceeded expectations and that he and Zuehlke have "both played really well."

The team didn't reach all of its goals this fall, but because the season is played in halves, there is still plenty of time for the Tommies to turn things around in the spring.

"It's a split season so you have to play well all year, not just half," Lundeen said.

For them to reach the national tournament they will have to either win the MIAC championship in the spring or be selected by a committee to receive one of five at-large bids.

In the past few years the selection committee has overlooked St. Thomas.

"Since I've been here," Lundeen said, "we've been left out by the committee even though we've been ranked higher."

But the players are optimistic about their chances of making it this year.

"I think our team's got as much talent and depth as we've seen in a while," Treacy said. "We beat all the teams we should have beat and of the ones we lost to, I think we can beat."

The Tommies are going to do their best to make a run this spring.

"I think the door is definitely open for us to get through to nationals," Lundeen said.

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