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Luck has little to do with it as skilled Villager notches 13th consecutive win in horseshoes

By MATT DIXON, DAILY SUN Apr 9, 2008

THE VILLAGES — Outside The Villages' Paradise Recreation Center on Tuesday, beneath the thick, natural canopy of shade provided by a stand of trees, a lively match of horseshoes was under way.

"It's all about the proper turn in the air; it has to leave your hand just right," explained Ed Napravnik, a resident of the Village of Hacienda South, who has lassoed gold medals in The Villages Florida Senior Games horseshoe tournament for 12 years running — 13 if you include this year's win. Napravnik competed in the age 80-84 division.

And if anyone can explain the intricacies of a properly pitched horseshoe, it is Napravnik: He has competed at the very highest level of horseshoes, qualifying for and taking gold at the National Senior Games three times.

Napravnik allows that he has had great success as a horseshoe player, but some of his most-memorable horseshoes-related yarns come from defeats, in a time when he was younger and, in his own mind at least, unbeatable. "I thought I could beat a man, so we bet \$20," recalls Napravnik. "The final score was 21-3; I lost."

Dan Brown is a competitor who is relatively new to the game and thought he was a pretty good horseshoes player; however, upon moving to The Villages, his novice status was confirmed. "I thought I was good until I moved down here," Brown said.

Brown says that he has been playing a lot more since moving to the Village of Sabal Chase. He feels he is now at a level where he can compete with some of The Villages' best players. "I have played more since I got here, and I have improved." All that practice paid dividends, as this year Brown finished second, taking home a silver medal.

Brown says he was drawn to the sport because of its individualistic nature. "I just got into it because it was an individual sport; you depend on no one but yourself," Brown said.

“OK, OK, you guys all get off my court,” bellowed Ken Cross, the only competitor in the age 90-94 division and a horseshoes senior statesman of sorts. “I have been playing for years, 50, no, wait, 60 years It has been a long time,” said Cross.

Cross has been around horseshoes for a long time, and offered some insight into why the game has become so popular in The Villages: “It’s the fellas, they are all just really good guys,” said Cross.

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