



information acquired from the WSHPA Hall of Fame Book, newsletters and other sources

LARRY KEMP

Eaton Rapids, MI

inducted 2006

Larry Kemp is one of the finest gentlemen to ever grace a horseshoe court in Michigan. With a firm handshake, a quick smile and a warm greeting, any and all who have ever met, or have competed against Larry, will readily agree that they are in the presence of a person who epitomizes the greatness of the game of horseshoes. Larry's love and passion for the game of horseshoes and the people who play it was a gift given to him by his father and grandfather. It was they who made Larry into the fierce competitor that he is today, because he was never given anything and each point he scored was hard earned. In 1988, Larry brought this family legacy to the Wolverine State Horseshoe Pitchers Association and has most assuredly passed it along to the entire membership.

Born in the Upper Peninsula, Larry began playing horseshoes at the age of five by standing behind a ten foot line drawn in the sand by his grandfather on the family farm in Rudyard. The Kemp family would gather at the farm on Sundays and after the chores were completed and the family dinner ate, the horseshoes came out. The stakes were pounded into small craters created by sliding shoes as they made their way to becoming ringers. The court had rather odd backboards as one stake was set ten feet behind the backdoor of the house and the other stake was set six feet in front of the outhouse door, which, because of its use, often caused delays in games. In order to leave the outhouse one had to first yell before exiting. As Larry grew and gained strength, the line drawn into the sand was moved back until, at the age of twelve, he began pitching from the full distance.

In 1974, Larry played an instrumental role in the formation of the Eastern Upper Peninsula Horseshoe Pitchers Association. Larry was a fervent promoter of the game as he built 15 courts at Flowing Well Tavern outside of Saint Ignace, which was to become the center of EUPHPA activities, ten courts in Rudyard and another 60 courts, made either with cement or wooden platforms, in parks and backyards, or next to bars throughout the eastern Upper Peninsula.

Not only was Larry active with the EUPHPA, he affiliated himself with the Upper Peninsula Horseshoe Pitchers Association. Tournaments were spread far and wide in that great expanse of lakes, streams and seemingly never-ending tree-lines highways. It was not unusual for him to traverse the peninsula to play tournaments in towns like Gwinn and Bruce Crossing. Larry was Upper Peninsula state champion in 1977 and served as UHPA president from 1978 to 1979.

Larry played in a doubles league in Rudyard during the 1970's and 1980's. Games were played to 21-points and the league's champions were awarded the Golden Shoes, which are

horseshoes painted gold and tied onto a rope. He and his partner had the Golden Shoes placed around their necks for six consecutive years, a record that still stands to this very day.

The first know sighting of Larry upon the WSHPA radar came at a tournament held at Woodside, in the Upper Peninsula, in 1981. Though he did not win the tournament, his pitching prowess proved influential by defeating Fred Smith and Ann Wedel in back-to-back games thus denying each an opportunity to tie with Roy Smith and force a play-off for the \$350.00 first prize. Larry's first WSHPA competition came in Class B during the 1982 state tournament held at Dimondale.

Economic conditions forced Larry to leave his much beloved family and Upper Peninsula to move to Florida where he was an active participant with that state's charter for three years. Upon Larry's return to Michigan in 1988, he read an article in the Lansing State Journal announcing league play at Chief Okemos Sportsman's Club outside of Dimondale. Once becoming a member, Larry was a tireless and enthusiastic worker. He could be seen with a shovel in his hands turning courts, painting fences and backboards, pushing a lawnmower, and building forms and pouring cement for new pitching platforms. It was Larry's brilliant idea to paint the backboards forest green and the stakes white thus providing a stark contrast between the two. The first tournament held at the club after doing this saw nearly every entrant pitch above their established ringer average. After that tournament, white stakes and contrasting backboards began to become the norm for many clubs throughout Michigan.

Truly, Larry is one of the top 40-foot flip-shoe artists, not only in Michigan, but the entire country. Watching Larry's shoe work is to behold beauty, and has mesmerized many an opponent and spectator alike. Taught to him by his father, Larry holds his Diamond Tournament shoe slightly right of center and the high arcing trajectory allows the shoe to gently meet the stake which produces a twisting effect thus enabling him to hold many more ringers than most flip-shoe pitchers. His ability to pitch high average games that involve many shoes can be verified by three-time state champion Robert "Oz" Williams who once stated, "I just can't beat that guy. He hits me with a 75% game every time I play him." Eight-time state champion, Tom Williams, added, "Larry has not only been tough against my dad, but the entire Williams family and everyone else who has played against him." Larry brings out the best in his opponents because each one understands that if they are to defeat him they will need to bring their A-game to the court. This is the greatest compliment and sign of respect any pitcher can receive from another pitcher. He has won numerous district tournament championships throughout his years of membership. Consistently a 60% or better pitcher, Larry's highest season average was 2002 in which he averaged 71% and was ranked as high as 32nd in the world, which led to invitations to some prestigious tournaments in Iowa.

Larry has competed in the Men's Championship Division at the state tournament from 1988 through 2003. He missed the 2004 tournament because of a family obligation, which has always come first for Larry, thus ending the longest streak of playing in Men's Championship Division, a distinction that he shared with Tom Williams. Twice Larry has finished runner-up, 1996 and 2003, third four times and annually finishes in the top half of the division. His best state tournament game was a 78.7% gem in which he threw 52 ringers in 66 shoes during the first game of the 1991 state tournament against Oz Williams.

The WSHPA has been well represented by Larry in team tournament competition. He was a

member of the first Michigan team to enter the Team World Championship in 1994. Larry has competed in the tournament in each of the following years and is currently consisting of himself, Judy Curtiss, Jim Wiltse and Clayton Bonham, Jr., finished runner-up to an outstanding Colorado team. At the Music City Team Tournament held in Joelton, Tennessee, Larry, Clayton and Tom Westbrook from South Carolina, won the Class B championship in 2003.

An ardent supporter of the Michigan-Ontario International Friendship Tournament, Larry has competed yearly in this unique cultural event since the tournament's expansion in 1990. Larry has served as chairman of the tournaments committee. In 1993 he was bestowed the honor of being named Michigan's team captain, a position that he has continuously held because of the outstanding qualities that he possesses and exhibits in association with every known meaning to the work "friendship" both on and off the courts.

Larry Kemp is the quintessential horseshoe pitcher. He is humble in victory, gracious in defeat and serves as a role model for all who aspire to become true gentlemen of the great game of horseshoes. Larry is a rare treasure for all of horseshoe pitching and he richly deserves the honor of becoming a member of the Wolverine State Horseshoe Pitchers Association's Hall of Fame.