

## The Mongoose Musings



### 2008 Open Racquetball Championships – October 22-26, 2008

The **2008 US Open Racquetball Championships** held at *The Racquet Club*, Memphis, TN, produced some of the most enthralling matches in recent memory. The return of **Kane Waselenchuk** made the event all the more memorable.

#### WPRO Singles – The Long-Awaited Glory

The women's singles pro division featured 32 players. The 19-year old **Paola Longoria** defeated **Cheryl Gudinas Holmes** 11-7, (8-11), 11-7, 11-7 in the finals to become the youngest US Open champion in women's and men's professional divisions. She was a woman on a mission. Using ferocious backhands and forehands, she consistently applied tremendous pressures on Holmes on both sides of the court. She was at her best when annoyed by bad calls and Holmes' gamesmanship antics.

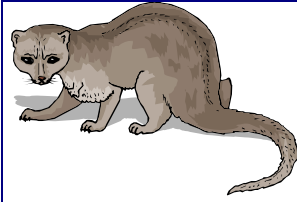
#### IRT Singles – The Demolition Man at Work

The men's singles pro division featured 64 players. In the division's finals, #11 seed, **Kane Waselenchuk** of Brownsville, Texas, bested #1 seed, **Rocky Carson III** of Ladera Ranch, CA 11-2, 11-2, 11-4 to become the four-time US Open champion. Carson had no answer for Waselenchuk's relentless bombs, flawless backhand splats, and eye-popping touch shots. It was demoralizing for the top seeded IRT player to be effortlessly manhandled by *The Demolition Man* on the racquetball's grandest stage of all. The Demolition Man won the match in a dominant fashion despite feeding regular diet of lob serves to Carson's forehand – daring the top ranked player to show what he's got on his strongest side.

#### Memorable Matches

Some of the most memorable matches witnessed by Mongoose during the Open Championships were as follows:

- **Alvaro Beltran vs. Kane Waselenchuk (Quarterfinal Men's Pro):** This was, in Mongoose's humble opinion, the best match of the championships. The match was replete with an eye-popping display of perfect splats, passing shots, and diving gets by both players. Waselenchuk brought out the artilleries, bombs, and the rest of his best stuff. Alvaro was a quiet and resilient warrior who strategically played the match with nothing to lose. He was cool, calm, and collected. He took Waselenchuk to the full distance before losing in a thrilling five-gamer, 11-6, (13-11), 11-2, (11-7), 11-5. Alvaro's intestinal fortitude allowed him to become Waselenchuk's toughest opponent during the Championships.

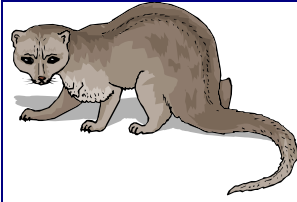


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- **Shane Vanderson vs. Jason Mannino (Quarterfinal Men's Pro):** Vanderson could do no wrong. His feared backhand was rolling perfect splats like there was no tomorrow. His forehand was also cooking kills after kills with astounding precision. It was an awesome display of racquetball at the highest level of artistry. Mannino was visibly frustrated throughout the match, wondering what he could do to build and sustain momentum on his side. While Mannino was busy trying to find a crack in Vanderson's armor, the King of Backhand coolly walked away with a decisive victory in 4 games, 8, (10), 9, 8.
- **Veronica Sotomayor vs. Cheryl Gudinas Holmes (Second Round Women's Pro):** During the warm-ups in the glaring lights of the portable glass court, the 16-year old, Sotomayor, evoked the kind of sympathy usually reserved for a potential victim heading into the lions den. For some, she looked much too young and vulnerable. However, Sotomayor wasted no time in proving that she belonged. She took the first game 12-10. She hung tough against one of WPRO's best players in Holmes before losing in four games and serving notice to the world that she's a force to be reckoned with in the women's pro division. The hitherto skeptical fans left the match much more convinced than ever that this young Stockton, CA resident has the game to become the youngest US Open champion.
- **Rhonda Rajsich vs. Brenda Kyzer (Quarterfinal Women's Pro):** This one had all the markings of a feel-good match. Kyzer was on a roll heading into the match. Seeded #8, Kyzer utilized deceptive line drive serves, good passing shots, and timely kills to defeat WPRO's #1 player, Rajsich, in four games, (7), 5, 9, 10. The victorious Kyzer was quite emotional after the match. Several fans could not hold back their tears of empathy at the sight of it all.
- **Chris Crowther vs. Jason Thoerner (Third Round Men's Pro):** In addition to being the most colorful character in IRT, Thoerner is arguably the most entertaining professional racquetball player in the world. He didn't disappoint his teeming fans. He came to play. His backhand was sizzling hot. Each time he unleashed a great shot, he turned around to make certain that the fans were fully appreciative of the shot and its beauty. He also relished agitating his opponent by asking, "You like that?" after almost every good shot. Thoerner won the match, 8, (9), (5), 7, 3. His good friends, **Mitch Williams** and **Shane Vanderson**, were on hand to cheer him and enjoy his playful on-the-court antics.
- **Clif Swain vs. Chris Crowther (Second Round Men's Pro):** Fans were too excited to see Swain, *The Incredible Southpaw*, back in action. The Southpaw worked up his adoring fans into frenzy with blistering line drive serves, incredible backhand splats, and ungodly overhead rollouts! Playing with an injured left knee throughout the match, Swain took the first game before losing to Crowther in four. The medal of courage was his for the taking.



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### Most Accessible Professional Players

Racquetball has the most accessible professional players in the world. However, some players were more accessible than others during the Championships. For Mongoose, the following were the most accessible players:

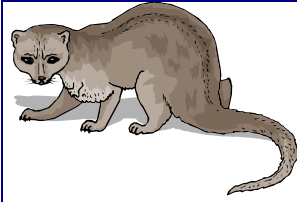
**Kane Waselenchuk:** He's a living legend with exemplary humility and cheerful disposition. When most folks were sleeping or partying late into the night, Waselenchuk was seen in the back courts of *The Racquet Club* helping and encouraging several amateur racquetball players. When not playing, he made himself accessible to fans and fellow players alike. During the party with the pros on Saturday, he walked around with his baby, chatted with almost everyone, and stood patiently as fans took pictures with him for posterity.

**Alvaro Beltran:** He's a classy and dignified gentleman who is always fun to talk with about racquetball and life in general. He's great with kids and adults alike. He doesn't allow a performance on the court to get him down for long. You can also enjoy his company immensely in a bar over a couple of cold ones.

**Kristen Bellows:** This *Super Woman* is one of the most gregarious people in the world. She mingled and talked with fans like a second nature. She advanced to the semifinal of women's singles pro division before losing to **Cheryl Gudinas Holmes**. Who says good things don't happen to good people?

**Jason Thoerner:** If you approach him while he's busy eating or drinking, he makes sure that you get a firm, warm handshake from him with a clean hand. When playing, he can be quite obnoxious – making life a living hell for whomever officiate his match. However, he's a complete gentleman off the court. Friends and fans love his indomitable spirit, radiant personality, and good sense of humor.

**Jack Huczek:** He's probably the most misunderstood and unappreciated professional racquetball player in the world. When he was playing against **Javier Moreno** in the quarterfinal, Mongoose was probably the only one in the gym who clapped enthusiastically each time he hit a good shot. He's obviously intense and business-like on the court – content to let his racquet do the talking for him instead of engaging in the usual macho bravado. Off the court, he makes himself unfailingly accessible to junior and adult fans alike. He dispenses game-improvement tips freely to interested parties, and embodies excellence through hard work.



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**Rocky Carson III:** He's always accessible to fans at virtually all racquetball tournaments and clinics he participates. However, during the Championships, he was mostly seen minutes before his scheduled matches, and appeared aloof like **Jason Mannino**. Perhaps the *Krowning Moment* guy occupied most of his waking hours.

**Mitch "The Wild Thing" Williams:** The dude looks like he always has FUN! He's fun to watch on the court, particularly when he starts bombing every shot without conscience. He's also a load of fun to socialize with off the court. His evolution into one of the best IRT players doesn't seem to be stopping him from hobnobbing happily with friends and fans alike after burning the midnight oil on the court.

**Ben Croft:** This dude is blossoming into one of the most talented and likeable IRT players. His on-the-court performance seldom dissipates his zeal for socialization with friends and fans off the court. He enjoys living life to the fullest.

**Rhonda Rajsich:** In spite of her legendary accomplishments on the racquetball court, Rhonda doesn't consider herself too big to give you hugs and firm handshake. Her trademark accessibility is a tremendous asset to WPRO.

**Javier Moreno:** He lost a lot of weight, and looked in great shape. He also toned down his on-the-court showmanship antics. Such dramatic changes didn't make him less approachable. On the contrary, he's still one of the popular fan favorites on and off the court. He's an entertaining comedian who can mix it up pretty good with the Eddie Murphys and Chris Rocks of this world.

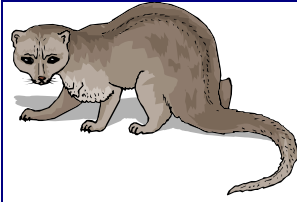
**Chris Crowther:** This big cat is one of the most intense competitors in the world. It's probably not a good idea to approach him after a bad loss. He's quite amicable off the court. He loves to talk about golf with fans. He's a great golf player in his own right, and can probably give Tiger Woods a run for his money if he plays the sport full-time.

### Honorable Mention

The following individuals deserve honorable mention here:

**Dave Ellis:** A very humble servant dedicated to promoting the sport of racquetball everywhere he goes. He's much loved and respected by people who came into contact with him.

**Russ Mannino:** He's a superb salesman with an infectious sense of humor. He can persuade you to buy even the junkiest stuffs in his backyard.



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**Bradley Kirch:** He lost badly to IRT's #11 **Juan Herrera** in the first round of men's pro division. The loss was not enough to keep the swashbuckling New Yorker down for long. He quickly rebounded to avenge the loss by defeating the same Herrera in three games in the third round of men's open division. This kid has the total package!

**Jose Rojas:** He's a very tough hombre. Both **John** and **Dave Ellis** had him well schooled in the game of racquetball. He lost the first two games to one of Canada's best, **Vincent Gagnon**, in the first round of men's pro division. He staged an amazing comeback with his blazing hot forehand and unorthodox backhand to win the match in five. He has bright future in IRT.

**Jimmy Lowe:** The *Chocolate Man* is a freak of nature. He's freakin' tall and fit! He won the CPRT's 2<sup>nd</sup> US Open championship by defeating **Woody Clouse** in the finals in four games.

### Future Tournaments

- **2008 St. Nick Splat Racquetball Tournament**, December 5-7, 2008, Severna Park Racquetball and Fitness Club, Millersville, MD. **Registration deadline: 12/2/08.** For details, check: <http://www.r2sports.com/tourney/home.asp?TID=4523>.
- **2008 Virginia Mistletoe Matchup Hope Tour**, Greenbriar North YMCA, Chesapeake, VA, December 5-7, 2008. Site: <http://www.r2sports.com/tourney/tourneyInfo.asp?TID=4504>.
- **2008 NY Long Island Holiday Classic**, December 6-7, 2008, Armitraj Fitness and Health Club, Bay Shore, NY. Site: <http://www.r2sports.com/tourney/home.asp?TID=4594>.

### A Parting Thought

**Kane Waselenchuk** has now won the first four IRT tournaments he participated, including the *2008 US Open Championships*. If he is still working off the "rust" after an extended hiatus, what does it portend for the future of competitive parity in IRT when he starts playing devoid of rust?

Racquetbally yours,

*Slemo*

**Slemo Warigon**, MBA, CIA, CISA, CICA  
The Mongoose Domain

*Racquetball – your sport for life!*