



Frank Perez of Mac's Marauders celebrates with teammates after his walk off home run to win the tournament

New York, New York!

By Jim Flanagan, Editor, Fastpitchwest.com;
Photos Courtesy of Maddy Flanagan; maddysphotos.com

January 21, 2007: NY Mac's Marauders Top NY Gremlins 3-1 in 2007 AAU International Final

[ORLANDO] - In one of the most exciting and memorable AAU championship games ever, Mac's Marauders of Ballston Lake, New York, won the 2007 AAU International title with a 3-1, 9 inning win over the New York Gremlins/Broken Bow. Eduardo Leonardo of Mac's tied the game at 1-1 with a dramatic home run in the bottom of the 7th inning.

Colin McKenzie of Mac's Marauders was the winning pitcher and took home Outstanding Pitcher award. McKenzie entered the game in the 8th inning in relief of starter Rob Schwyer, while Frankie Perez of Mac's Marauders won the MVP award on the strength of his game winning walk off home run in the bottom of the 9th.

The Tournament

The AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) International Men's Fastpitch Tournament may well be the largest international men's fastpitch tournament in the world. Now in its 8th year, the 2007 AAU tournament drew thirty-two teams from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, the Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, Columbia, Venezuela, and even one from Europe for the first time ever, the ADASI squad from Spain. In addition, some players whose

home country did not field a team joined up with others, including two of the world's best, Sebastian Gervesutti of Argentina and Rhys Casley of New Zealand.

The tournament started in 2000 with just eight teams, and has grown steadily each year, thanks to the efforts of tournament directors Alex Linares of the AAU and Ken Hackmeister, who is the Executive Director of the ISC (International Softball Congress), the premier organization in the men's game. The tournament hosted 28 teams in 2005 and 2006, with the field growing to 32 teams this year, its largest ever. Quality breeds quality, attracting some of the best umpires in the game, and an ever-growing contingent of player talent. Many of the players participating in the tournament are members of their respective National teams. But because it takes place in the "off season," it has become popular to mix up the team rosters, with plenty of intermediate level players getting an opportunity to compete with and against the game's best.

In addition to the outstanding organization running the tournament, the AAU has proved popular because of the top notch fields at the Disney Wide World of Sports® Complex in Orlando, Florida, and Disney theme parks, providing a great winter escape for players and fans alike from the colder regions of the globe. This year, Al Doran, the proprietor of the

Alsfastball.com, "Holy Grail" of men's fastball, traveled down to Orlando from his home in Canada to cover the tournament first hand, as did young Canadian broadcaster Kyle Smith, Joe Todd, and Bill Hillhouse, who helped the Ballparkradio.com crew expand the radio broadcasts from four to eight games. Selected games from the tournament have been broadcast to a worldwide audience since 2004, allowing fans to enjoy the action, live on the Internet, and for the players to hear the games via "podcasts".

The AAU tournament has one of the largest collections of photos, thanks to the tireless efforts of Maddy Flanagan of www.maddysphotos.com, who has been on hand for the past four years. This year, she took an unbelievable 5000 shots, sharing her online albums of hundred of photos for all to enjoy. This year also marked the fourth year that the tournament has been covered in *Softball Magazine*, the "Sports Illustrated of Softball."

Tournament Format

The AAU International Tournament utilizes a "four-game guarantee" for all of the teams competing. The field of thirty-two teams were divided into eight pools of four teams each, with each team playing three "pool play" games, over the first two days, which determined seeding for the single elimination playoff round over the last two days, culminating in Sunday afternoon's finale. Teams reaching the finals this year played eight games over the four day event.

The Championship Game

After seventy-eight (78) games played by the thirty-two teams over four days, the championship game ironically came down to a battle between two teams from New York, Mac's Marauders from Ballston Lake, New York and the New York Gremlins/Broken Bow. Both New York teams entered Sunday's championship game with unblemished 7-0 records, behind world class pitching and offenses. In the semi-finals, the New York Gremlins beat a very tough Texaco Pirates team from the Bahamas while Mac's Marauders squeaked past one of the world's top teams, the Kitchener Hallman Twins of Ontario, Canada. As they headed into the championship game, you could almost hear the voice of Frank Sinatra, singing:

Start spreading the news, I'm leaving today; I want to be a part of it – New York, New York...

These vagabond shoes, are longing to stray; Right through the very heart of it - New York, New York...

I wanna wake up in a city, that doesn't sleep; And find I'm king of the hill - top of the heap.

"King of the hill – top of the heap" was exactly where the two New York teams wanted to be at tournament's end. Though only one team would come away as AAU champions, the two teams battled valiantly to the end, until the late inning heroics of Mac's "Dominican Duo" of Eduardo Leonardo and Frank Perez captured the 2007 crown for Mac's Marauders.

Ironman Canadian pitcher Rob Schweyer took the hill for Mac's Marauders in the title game, while former Team USA pitcher Doug Middleton toed the rubber for the New York Gremlins/Broken Bow.

Both teams put runners aboard in the early frames, but could not push across any runs. The Gremlins took a 1-0 lead in the fourth inning when New Zealander Rhys Casley singled to lead off the inning, advanced to second on an error, and scored on a single by Jordan Taveras. The Gremlins/Bow team held that precarious 1-0 lead into the seventh, with Terry Luster taking over for Gremlins starter Middleton, while Mac's starter Schweyer remaining in the game. The Gremlins were just three outs from the 2007 AAU crown, but Eduardo Leonardo of Mac's Marauders had other ideas, stunning the Gremlins with a solo home run to lead off the bottom of the seventh inning to tie the score. With two outs, Mac's slugger Boomer Brush tripled, and stood just 60 feet away from ending the tournament. Mac's Calvin Miller then drilled a deep shot to straightaway center that looked to be the game ender, until Gremlin/Bow centerfielder Alfonso Gonzalez leaped and crashed through the breakaway fencing to make a spectacular, game-saving catch. Mac's Colin McKenzie came on in the ninth to relieve fellow Canadian Rob Schweyer, who pitched two gems on the final day, one in the quarterfinals and another in the finale. In the bottom of the ninth, it was once again Eduardo Leonardo leading things off. Leonardo did

Eduardo Leonardo hitting the game tying home run in the bottom of the seventh inning of the championship game for the eventual champions.



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not homer this time, but he did get things going with a single, setting the stage for Frank Perez's dramatics. Perez blasted the first pitch from Steve Price beyond the reach of Alfonso Gonzalez, or anyone else for a two-run homer, and 3-1 game winner, capping the most exciting AAU Championship game ever.

Mac's Marauders' Run to the 2007 AAU Title: Pool Play (3-0, top seed); 10-7 win over Puerto Rico (WP-Schweyer); 5-0 win over New World Investments, Florida, USA (WP-McKenzie); 9-2 win over Omaha, Nebraska, USA (WP-Schweyer); Pool Play record, 3-0, top seed from Pool G; Single Elimination Playoff Round (5-0); 15-0 win over Jamaica (WP-Joseph); 12-0 win over Ohio Batteries, OH, USA (WP-McKenzie); 8-1 win over Team Minnesota, MN, USA (WP-Schweyer); 4-3 win over Kitchener Hallman Twins, ON Canada (WP-McKenzie); 2-1 win over NY Gremlins, NY, USA (WP-McKenzie); (9 inning, walk off home run win in championship game); Playoff record - 5-0; Overall record - 8-0.

After coming close in prior years with his Heflin teams (Final Four last year), perhaps no one was happier with the win than longtime skipper, sponsor and organizer Tom McAvoy (the "Mac" in Mac's Marauders). Tom's teams are perennially in the hunt at the ISC World Tournament and are one of the true gentlemen in the game.

Mac's Coach Paul "Chico" McCart had this to say about the 2007 AAU Tournament: "The AAU tournament gets more competitive every year and harder to win. We had a great bunch of guys again this year. Mac puts so much into this team, so it was a great thing to win it. Alex Linares and Ken Hackmeister, and all of the AAU and Disney staff work very hard to make the AAU a great tourney. I'm looking forward to hearing the replay of the final on Ballparkradio.com."

Mac's Coach Billy Smith was excited to be back on the field after missing last year, recalling one of the tournaments' most exciting games between Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (Chicago NY): "When the Dominican Republic [Chicago NY] played the Puerto Rican team, the game had all the markings of a World Cup Soccer game. The action was frantic, a back and forth seesaw battle that came down to the wire. The fans were passionate, cheering with enthusiastic pride. When it was over, people were crying, joyfully and sadly, but there were no hard feelings, just sportsmanlike handshakes and nods of the head as if to say 'it's a shame someone had to lose that one.' Hats off to both teams!"

Like McCart and the rest of the Marauder players, Smith was happy about the championship win for skipper Tom McAvoy: "I think I speak for the whole team when I say 'That one was for Mac!' There was a little extra on the line facing another New York team in the finals, ex-teammates and sponsor, and to have it go 9 innings and win it on a walk off solo homer is as dramatic as it gets."

Smith gave kudos to Tom McAvoy, noting that: "Every guy was there because of Tom McAvoy...I will be proud to show off our gold AAU medal, and remember how proud Mac was of our team."

Other Tournament Highlights

The tournament lived up to its "International" name, with 2007 marking the first ever visit from a European team, the ADASI squad from Spain joining teams from Canada, the United States, Central and South America. Players from Argentina and New Zealand also competed. The Dominican Republic sent a large contingent of players (Chicago NY of the Dominican Republic, sporting Chicago Cub uniforms, while Puerto Rico and Columbia sent two teams.

The field of Canadian teams grew, with Millwood Logistics of Ontario, Canada joining two other returning teams: the Kitchener Hallman Twins, and St. Thomas Storm, also of Ontario. All three Canadian teams made it to the Elite Eight, with both Millwood and St. Thomas eliminated by Hallman.

Youth made its presence felt, with Puerto Rico sending a team comprised mostly of its 25 and under players, and New World Investments of Florida mostly USA Jr. Men.

Mexicali, a two-time Final Four finisher returned, after a one-year absence, making it to the Elite Eight, and giving Mexico two teams.

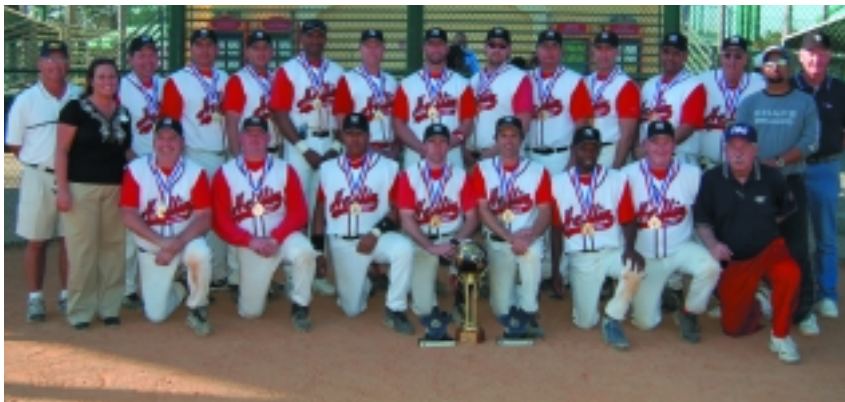
The Texaco Pirates of the Bahamas made a big jump, making it to the Final Four. It was just three years ago that they finished 24th, winning the four-team consolation tournament. The Pirates appear "ready for prime time", having competed in their first ever ISC World Tournament last year in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, and will be hosting their own tournament in May of this year, on their own island, Man-O-War Cay in the Bahamas, at its home field which sits right alongside its white sand beach.

Millwood Logistics, of Ontario, Canada were the Cinderella team of sorts in this year's tournament, led by unheralded pitcher Scott Wagar. Wager has started to garner more attention of late, with good performances in last year's ISC World Tournament and Senior Canadian tournament in Prince George BC. Millwood won two playoff games including previously unbeaten Florida Fastpitch, and came within one out of knocking off local Ontario rival the Kitchener Hallman Twins, who rank in the top 5 or 10 teams in the world. Millwood led Hallman 5-2 at one point, with the lead trimmed to 5-4 in the final inning. It took a two out home run off the bat of the 2006 Senior Canadians MVP, Dale Levy to get the Twins even and rally for the 6-5 win.

Millwood also figured in the feel good story of the tournament, with first baseman Mike Vanboekel being pulled out of retirement by his younger teammates. Mike (tried to) retire last year, at the age of 39, after playing for 34 years. Though he claims he is not known for his hitting, he had a number of hits in the tournament, including a home run, which earned him the clean-up spot in the batting order. After the tough loss to rival Hallman, Mike took off his cleats and left them sitting on the first base bag. Retirement official.



Millwood just missed knocking off one of the top 5 teams in the world, losing in the last inning of their playoff game. Mike took his cleats off, and left them on the first base bag, that he had tended all weekend long. Retirement. Officially.

**NY Mac's Marauder's, USA****NY Gremlins/Broken Bow, USA****Kitchener Hallman Twins, ON, Canada****Texaco Pirates, Bahamas**

Pool Play

The first two days of the tournament was comprised of 48 "pool play" games, to determine seeding for the playoff round. The top seeds from the eight pools were:

Los Socios, Venezuela
Texaco Pirates, Bahamas
NY Gremlins/Broken Bow, USA
Chicago, NY, Dominican Republic
Kitchener Hallman Twins, ON, Canada
Florida Fastpitch, USA
NY Mac's Marauders, USA
Team Minnesota

Single Elimination Playoffs

All thirty-two teams were seeded for the single elimination playoffs.

First Round Playoff winners:

Los Socios, Venezuela
Mexicali, MX
Texaco Pirates, Bahamas
Miami Venezuela, USA
NY Gremlins/Broken Bow, USA
Ambassadors, Virgin Islands
Chicago, NY, Dominican Republic
Puerto Rico
Kitchener Hallman Twins, ON, Canada
St. Thomas, ON, Canada
Florida Fastpitch, USA
Millwood Logistics, ON, Canada
NY Mac's Marauders, USA
Ohio Batteries, OH, USA
Houston Aces, TX, USA
Team Minnesota

Second Round Playoff Winners

Mexicali MX, Puerto Rico, and Millwood Logistics of Ontario Canada each knocked off pool winners in the second round to advance to the "Elite Eight":

Mexicali, MX
Texaco Pirates, Bahamas
NY Gremlins/Broken Bow, USA
Puerto Rico
Kitchener Hallman Twins, ON, Canada
Millwood, ON, Canada
NY Mac's Marauders, USA
Team Minnesota

Third Round Playoff Winners – The Final Four

Texaco Pirates, Bahamas
NY Gremlins/Broken Bow, USA
Kitchener Hallman Twins, ON, Canada
NY Mac's Marauders, USA

Semi-Final Playoff Winners - Finalists

NY Gremlins/Broken Bow, USA
NY Mac's Marauders, USA