



2004 AAU International Men's Fastpitch Tournament Runners Up
Mexicali - Mexico



fashion, with a professional caliber two story press box in the center, which also houses the concession stand. The fields are beautifully maintained and even provide a telephone in each dugout for managers to call in their substitutions to the press box. The softball complex shares the same grounds as "Crackerjack Field," which is used by major league baseball's Atlanta Braves for Spring Training.

Tournament Organization: The 2004 tournament was organized jointly by Alex Linares, of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), and Ken Hackmeister, the executive director of the International Softball Congress, which annually hosts the premier fastpitch tournament in men's fastpitch, the ISC World Tournament. The AAU tournament staff also includes top flite umpires, and of course, the professional Disney staff to help run the event. This year, for the first time ever at the AAU, five of the games were broadcast over the internet, via "streaming audio," by Jim Flanagan of www.fastpitchwest.com permitting the fans back home - and all over the world - to listen to the games live. Jim's wife Maddy provided online coverage of the event, including hundreds of photos taken by Maddy, posted on the website for the enjoyment of all.

AAU Tournament Director Alex Linares credits the organizational skills of Ken Hackmeister for a good deal of the tournament's success. Those who attended the tournament also point to Linares' background as a player and coach, as a key ingredient for success, noting that Alex knows what teams want and expect in a top level tournament. Linares goes out of

his way to be a gracious host and keep in touch with the participating teams. This year, he provided an authentic Cuban dinner at the host hotel as part of the festivities, a big hit with many in attendance. Linares himself points out that "of course, the teams love the idea of playing fastpitch in January, and the teams seem to like the international flavor of the tournament."

Player Comments: Dave Bailey, player manager for a team from Ontario, Canada was among those pleased with his teams' AAU tournament experience. "The tournament was organized and carried out very professionally in my opinion. And the facilities [at the Disney complex] themselves are second to none. The other thing that we really enjoyed about the tournament was that we found it to be a very unique and diverse cultural experience, and a great experience to play teams from other countries that we usually don't have the opportunity of playing against..." The benefits of Orlando weather in January was not lost on Bailey either, as he added with a smile: "It sure beats snowshoeing back home."

Jim Yates, an Ohio pitcher playing for the Florida Suns echoed the praise of Bailey and others in attendance at the tournament: "[Tournament Directors] Alex and Ken both did an excellent job. The games were on time and the facilities were second to none. And playing in January is awesome."

The Teams: This year, the AAU had its largest field of teams ever, twenty-four, coming from a variety of countries, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia, Panama, the Bahamas, and Virgin Islands. The teams were divided into six pools of 4 teams each, playing three "pool play" (round robin) games, followed by elimination bracket play. The top sixteen teams advanced to the Championship bracket, while the bottom eight entered the consolation bracket. Among the players were many top level players and pitchers, including a number with ISC World Tournament experience.

Pool Play Results: The twenty-four teams were divided into six pools of four teams each, playing three (3) round robin games within the pool. Los Socios, Puerto Rico, Sebringville, Ontario Canada, the Texas Stars, Mexicali and the Fryers of the British Virgin Island were the top seeds from their pools, while the Atlanta Blast, Alabama Fastpitch, Florida Suns, Panama, Bloomington Illinois, and Fedlock of Washington DC were the second seeds. If there was a surprise team, it was the Fryers of the British Virgin Islands, who went 3-0 in pool play for the #3 seed overall. It was their first trip to the AAU, but they brought along a good contingent of supportive, friendly fans, making them a favorite of the fans.

Championship Elimination Bracket: At the conclusion of pool play, the 16 top teams were placed in a single elimination Championship bracket, while the other 8 advanced to a single elimination championship bracket. The highest seeded teams matched up with lowest seeded teams in eight opening round games. In the first round of the Championship bracket, eight winners advanced:

- Mexicali, Mexico over Columbia;
- Panama over Fedlock, Washington DC;
- Sebringville, Ontario Canada over Atlanta;
- Heflin Gremlins, New York over Puerto Rico;
- Fryers, British Virgin Islands over Saskatoon/Jacksonville;
- Bloomington Illinois over Texas;
- Florida Suns over Alabama Fastpitch, and
- Los Socios over Miami/Dominican.

Second round games were played Saturday afternoon and early evening, leaving only four teams to return on Sunday for the "Final Four." Second round survivors were: • Mexicali over Panama; • Sebringville, Ontario, Canada over Heflin New York; • Bloomington Illinois over Fryers and • Los Socios, Venezuela over Florida.

Interestingly, the "Final Four" teams all hailed from different countries,

making the tournament a truly international one, right down to the final day. The four semi-finalists were from Mexico, Canada, the United States and Venezuela.

Semi-Finals: The semi-finals started Sunday morning, January 25, 2004, pitting Mexicali Mexico against the Sebringville Sting of Ontario Canada, and Bloomington Illinois, USA against Los Socios, Venezuela.

The semi-final game between Mexicali, Mexico and the Sebringville Sting of Ontario, Canada proved to be the most exciting game of the final day, with Mexicali scoring two runs in the sixth inning, for a come from behind victory. Sebringville had taken a 2-1 led in the top of the sixth inning, on a solo home run by catcher Brian Stere, only to have Mexicali's first batter of the bottom of the sixth inning, first baseman Arturo Solano hit a home run to tie it. Mexicali rallied to load the bases, scoring the winning run on an infield error, for a spot in the finals. Mexicali's Alejandro Villalobos picked up the win.

In the other semi-final game, Los Socios, Venezuela eliminated Bloomington, Illinois, 9-1. Bloomington has entered the single elimination bracket as a number 10 seed, ousting #3 Fryers of the British Virgin Island the night before, after a 5-0 opening round win over the Texas Stars. (Winners of last year's 45-and-over and 50-and-over Nationals). Los Socios had reached the semi-finals with convincing wins over Miami/Dominican and the Florida Suns. In their 7-2 win