

88...You Have Got to be Kidding

I am 88 years old. Never expected to be 88 and still playing handball. Don't say 88 years "young" because I am closer to the end than to the beginning and that adjective is pandering and embarrassing and false. If you have never been 88, I can tell you a bit about it that you would not know.

I have written about "Hitting the Wall" (available upon request) which begins around the age of 50. I am a lot smarter handball player than players half my age but they are stronger, hit harder, run faster, and react quicker. These are the attributes that are required to win and these are what is missing at the age of 88. But winning is not important anymore. Playing is what is important.

In the sixty years of playing handball, I have never had a serious injury, never had a part replaced, or been sick and out of the game for more than a few weeks. Most of this I attribute to learning fundamentals and sticking with them. If you teach handball, you will learn to play better.

Never dive for the ball because it is the last shot that you will get in a rally and usually fails.

Hit passing shots because these are more effective than "front to back."

Killing the ball is used when all the stars are in line. (Opponent behind me, time to get in position, closer to the front wall.)

Accurately placed shots (with or without power) are better than wild abandon.

Hit Ceiling shots when in controlled defense and do it properly.

Use the Serve as an offensive opportunity because it is.

I won my first Nationals at the age of 69. I won the 70B thanks to a December birth date. First person to congratulate me was the legendary Max Laskow. Since then I have won seven nationals in singles and doubles in three-wall and four-wall. Also, Worlds in four-wall singles and doubles. If you want to win in Singles, practice, practice, practice. If you want to win doubles ... get a complimentary partner.

So many of my friends that I played handball with and against have died and I truly miss them. So many have been hurt or aged out of the game. So many have knees replaced and come back stronger than ever. Same thing with hips and shoulders. I do wonder if they had learned and practiced proper techniques, would injuries have been avoided? Maybe ... maybe not.

I now can't run and chase the ball so unless it comes to me, I can't hit it. I used to be able to. My stamina is weak and I have to take more time outs than are allowed (my opponents do not object). The strength that I had is gone, so often I have to fist the ball just to get it to the front wall. There was a time when I could play all day and want more ... now two games are enough.

Naps are a great invention. They were made just for babies and old men. I nap for about an hour in the afternoon. Sleeping at night is a series of longer naps. About three hours at a time with a bathroom call in between. Never have more than six hours sleep and wish it were longer.

88 really is not so bad when you think about all the other catastrophes that could happen. I am thankful that I was introduced to handball for stress relief, for the friendships, for the travel opportunities, and for the health benefits.

Live better ... live longer. Keep handball in perspective. Have fun. It is just a game.