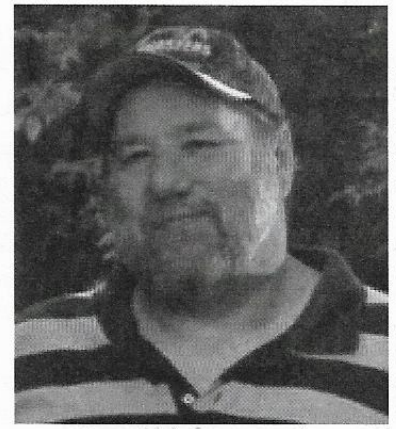


Don Kangas - 2023 WHPA Hall of Fame Inductee



Don Kangas was born in 1955 and raised in Gwinn, Michigan. His dad, Eino, pitched horseshoes. Don started pitching with Eino on the court in their yard at an early age. Don recalls that they had a lot of winter snowfall there. The snow would come off the roof in early spring and settle on the ground between the stakes. They would pitch over the hill of snow and walk around it when they pitched. Don started pitching from 30 feet when he was seven years old. Don was a horseshoe prodigy. He pitched in the junior's class up to age 16. He never lost a game in juniors. He was able to pitch from 40 feet and compete in the area bar leagues by the time he was fourteen. Don and his dad had a hand in building 15 courts in Gwinn.

Don was president of the area horseshoe league, and they had over 80 pitchers. Don tried to make it fun for all that came. He would draft teams each year with the intent of making them fair and competitive. He regularly took others with him to tournaments. Don and Eino would come down to the big tournament in Mountain. They rented a cabin and always had a fun weekend. It was easy to see that Eino and Don were truly best friends.

Don followed in his dad's footsteps and worked in the area mines when he grew up. Work in mining started to dry up in the 1980's. Don ended up moving to Colgate, WI, where he found new work after mining. Don Kangas joined the WHPA in 1987. The left-hander easily stood out from the field with his 1¾ reverse delivery. Don's delivery was also one of the fastest ever seen. He typically would pitch from the opposite side of the court than his competitors since he was left-handed. Whether he had first pitch, or second, Don's shoes would quickly be released, one after the other. The fast pace seemed to keep pressure on whoever he was playing. Clarence Bellman, from Indiana, was also known to be a fast pitcher. Don and Clarence faced each other at Team World. John Secord was quoted in the Newsletter as saying their delivery was so fast that it seemed that those two almost had all four shoes in the air at the same time. That game must be the unofficial fastest game ever played at Team World.

Don had a prolific 18-year horseshoe pitching career in Wisconsin. He is a 3-time Men's State Champion, winning in 1989, 1992, and 1997. He is one of only 11 men to have won the Wisconsin State Tournament 3 times or more. Don pitched in the top class (A/Championship depending on year) in each of the 16 State Tournaments he competed in. He finished in the top 3 places in 11 of those 16 years: 3 Champion, 4 Runner-Up, and 4 Third Place finishes. Don had an incredible career 104-46 win/loss record and 65.57% State Tournament ringer percentage, 5,099 ringers out of 7,776 shoes pitched. He holds the 10th (70.68% in 1992) and 15th (69.92% in 1997) highest averages in the Men's Division in the State Tournament since 1967. Don holds 11 of the top 75 highest averages since 1967. Only Randy Rein has more with 12. Don was also selected for the WI #1 team for Team World 16 times. He pitched Don Kangas - 2023 Hall of Fame Inductee 70.76% in 1996 for his best average in a Team World. Don has many memories of his tournament pitching. However, one of his fondest memories was not made at a tournament. Walter Ray Williams, Jr came to Green Bay for a bowling tournament. Walter would typically pitch against a few area pitchers at bowling events. Don showed up and was able to pitch against him three games, ringers only. The first two were 50 shoe games. Don had 43 to WR 41. The next game Don had 33 to WR 45. Because of time, the third game was 20 shoes. Don had 18 to WR 20.

According to Don, it is all about having fun with the horseshoe family and doing whatever you can to promote the game we all love. Don married Rebecca Brown, formerly of Arizona, on September 22, 1990, in West Allis. Their wedding reception was held at the Lone Star Tavern, a.k.a. the Goldendale Horseshoe Club. Don and Becky arrived at the reception in style, but wearing a tuxedo did not keep Don from getting on the courts and pitching a few games of horseshoes with his friends. Even Becky went out on the courts and pitched a few shoes. Their wedding was front page news in the November 1990 issue of the Wisconsin Horseshoe Newsletter. The Kangas's also had a reception in Gwinn, Michigan a few weeks later. Becky was a regular at tournaments as she always went along to support Don. Don and Becky had a son, Daniel, in 1993. Danny was also part of the Kangas entourage at tournaments. In 1996, Danny overwhelmed everyone when Becky brought him out to the middle of the courts when the awards presentation was about to begin at the State Tournament in Eau Claire. Becky handed Danny the microphone and quickly moved out of the way. Danny immediately belted out the National Anthem at the age of 3. The audience was amazed by his performance and gave him the loudest applause of the day.

Don moved back to Upper Michigan with his family around 2006. Becky passed away on February 8, 2012. Don went through cancer treatments in 2016 and is now cancer free. Eino passed away on September 22, 2019, at the age of 94. Danny now lives and works in the Detroit, MI area, is married, and has a 3-year-old child. Don continues to live in Rock, Michigan. There are plenty of pitchers that would like to see him pitch again. He just might come back and play again. The WHPA Hall of Fame Committee is honored to award Don Kangas as the 2023 inductee into the WHPA Hall of Fame. Congratulations!