

The

ADVOCATE

STAMFORD, CONN., MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 1983

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How it's just how it's done, Louie Caruso of the Ansonia team ends a wooden ball down the dirt court yesterday in the 1983 Stamford Open Bocce Tournament at Scalzi Park.



Bocce generates plenty of tension and excitement, as these fans make clear as they apply a little body English to yesterday's competition.

Bocce tourney was pure Italiano

By Mark Feel
Staff Writer

It began under the warm, sunny skies of morning with the first pot of hot espresso and the first slow rolls of the red and green wooden bocce balls.

It ended more than 12 hours later, after innumerable pots of the rich, dark brew and after 32 teams from three states had vied under the sun and nighttime lights of Scalzi Park for the championship of the 1983 Stamford Open Bocce Tournament.

When it was over, a visiting team from Derby edged out a hometown quintet for the title and the \$400 prize offered in this first-ever event by the sponsor, Medaglia D'Oro

espresso coffee.

But for the second-place team, sponsored by Local 1083 a custodian's union employee by the Stamford Board of Education, yesterday's run for the title provided an unexpected pleasure, if not a long, tiring day.

"We never expected to go this far," said Stamford's Frank Santarella, of the second-place team. "We came here at 9 in the morning and expected to be gone within two hours.

"We're all pretty inexperienced at this game," Santarella said. "And most of these guys here have played for years. But here we are 12 hours later. We're all tired, but

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Bocce

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it was fun to get this far."

Bocce is a traditional Italian game played in a 64-foot-long dirt court with raised wooden sides. Two teams of four players and a coach each play with eight large wooden balls and a smaller target ball called the "pallina."

The object for each team is to get their balls as close as possible to the target ball, while knocking away their opponent's balls and scoring points in a best-two-out-of-three match.

"It's a traditional game and it's very popular here in Stamford," said Pete Capitili, one of the tournament organizers. Capitili is an official for the Stamford Bocce League, and one of several local players who decided nearly a year ago that the city could annually support a large regional tournament.

So, after many months of planning, league officials yesterday welcomed a total of nearly 160 bocce players from Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York to the eight courts at Scalzi Park for the first annual affair.

"We hope it becomes an annual event," said Bob Fiore, another of the tournament's organizers. "We hope we get the prize money up a little more each year and keep attracting more teams. Next year we hope it goes for two days."

A key hurdle in guaranteeing the success of this year's tournament, Fiori said, was attracting a sponsor.

Medaglia D'Oro, makers of espresso coffee, agreed to back the tournament and yesterday provided their own special brand of energy throughout the day from underneath broad umbrellas bearing the traditional Italian colors of white, red and green.

"They said they'd come back next year, too," said Capitili of the sponsors. "And that's important for us. We have nice courts here at the park and we think the city's big enough to support a very big annual tournament if we just keep growing a little at a time."

He added that the day is a family and social draw as well, as spectators and family members gather in groups to cheer, eat and talk. Yesterday's crowd swelled at times to nearly 150 people.

While bocce is a traditional game that places a premium on experience, Capitili said more and more young people are being drawn into competition by the success and popularity of the 32-team Stamford league. He said the league now sponsors competition for youngsters and women.

As further inspiration for any newcomers yesterday was the performance of the team from Local 1038, a five-some with only one truly seasoned player that rolled over several more experienced teams on its way to the final round.

"I've played the game for 15 years," said team captain Andrew Cerreta. "But the rest of these guys have only played for a year or two. We really never thought we'd do this well. But we got lucky and just stayed hot."

Rounding out the team were John Mazza, Louis DeBri-sco and Bobby Dyer. The team captured a close semi-final win that took more than two hours as they nipped another Stamford team, sponsored by Bongiorno's store.

But the Derby team was too experienced in the end, and rolled to consecutive victories, 16-6, 16-10, to capture the first Stamford title and the top cash prize.