

sun-sentinel.com/news/broward/sfl-flcnscenterbr1101cwnov01,0,7419694.story

South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Beach volleyball players energized by steady growth of tour across state

Beach volleyball players energized by steady growth of tour across state

By Gary Curreri

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

November 1, 2009

What started out as a fundraiser to buy volleyball nets along Fort Lauderdale's beachfront more than two decades ago has turned into a nice gig for Gino Ferraro.

The 40-year-old trendsetter is the owner of the Florida Beach Volleyball Tour, which puts on about a dozen tournaments during the year across the state. The majority of the events are in South Florida.

"It is not a bad office," joked Ferraro, a Fort Lauderdale resident who started the tour 21 years ago and recently staged the Fall Fiesta on the beachfront in his hometown. The event attracted 45 teams.

While soaking up the sun and surf draws most people to the beach, participants in the Fall Fiesta were there to take care of business.

"The sport has just been [expanding] every year," Ferraro said. "We have been growing between 15 and 20 percent every year. Now we are getting a lot more juniors out, where before it wasn't a mainstream sport. There is a better awareness of the game, and a lot more juniors are coming out to play."

Ferraro said it is important to draw younger players.

"They are coming out at 10, 11 and 12 years old, and they continue on up the ranks and then play in the adult divisions," Ferraro said. "They basically get hooked early and they are here for life."

Ferraro said more and more players are splitting time between the beach and indoor game. College and high school players often look for some type of training to do during their offseason, and they get it at the beach, he said.

"On the beach, there are only two players, and you have to be able to do everything," Ferraro said. "You have to be able to pass and set, whereas in indoors, you tend to get very specialized. You can just be a hitter, just a passer, just a setter."



BETHANY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
In downtown Ft. Lauderdale

For a limited time register for next year & **Save as much as 37%** off our regular annual tuition for Grades K-8!

- * 2-Yr-Olds Through Grade 8
- * 20 Students Maximum Per Class
- * Top 10% on Standardized Testing
- * Fully Accredited

OPEN HOUSE
Nov. 5, 2009 - 8:30a.m.

[Click For More Info](#)

Ferraro said he has between 10 and 12 events during the regular season, which runs from March through August. There will also be a few during the offseason and holidays.

This year's event marked the first time he had a tour attraction in October. During an average summer, events will be in places such as Hollywood, Deerfield Beach, Clearwater and Siesta Key, along with Fort Lauderdale. He also is planning on taking the tour to Cocoa Beach.

"We have 22 divisions, from junior boys' and girls' 12s to 18s to a novice division to a pro-am division," said Ferraro, who teamed with Neil Mayo to win the Men's AAA Division at last month's event. "I like it because it is still a team sport, but there is a lot of individual effort. You are only as good as your partner out here."

Fort Lauderdale's Leigh Andrew teamed with Southwest Ranches' Luke Jackson to win the Coed Division as they defeated Parkland's Kaitlin Kirsner and Ben Mayell, of [Delray Beach](#), 21-15 in the finals.

Andrew, 15, a Westminster Academy sophomore, has been playing in the events for almost three years.

"I like being on the beach and outside," said Andrew, who plays for her school's volleyball team. "It is really competitive, and everybody is really friendly. It is intense, but it is still fun and something to do on the weekends."

Andrew said it has helped her hone her overall volleyball skills.

"It helps your vertical jump because the sand is deep, so when you get in the gym, you can jump higher," she said. "It also helps with your footwork and your all-around game, and you have to have good communication, so that also helps with your indoor [play]. You have to be a better all-around player."

Kirsner took up the sport this year. The 16-year-old is a junior at North Broward Prep.

"This is hard because it is almost the same size as an indoor court, and on an indoor court you have six people," Kirsner said. "You have to cover a lot more ground with just two people. It is more of a fun thing, but if you win, it is great. It is good to win, and you get a nice tan."

Kirsner and Mayell were playing together for the first time in the tournament. She said coed is definitely different than playing junior girls.

"Guys hit a lot harder, so it is different playing coed," Kirsner said. "It's great exercise and you meet new people. I go to the beach every weekend and play with my friends. It will take a lot of work, but I'd like to play AVP (Association of Volleyball Professionals).

For more information, visit www.flbeachvolleyball.com or call 954-316-6642.

Gary Curreri can be reached at SportsCom5@aol.com.

Copyright © 2009, [South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#)