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SPORTS 'N SPOKES

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Hard work + Support
+ Determination = Success

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changes lives

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A game with no boundaries

U.S. OPEN
Hall makes it 5!

EVERYONE *plays*

by Sean Fallon

Bankshot Basketball has a simple goal: Include anyone who wants to participate—regardless of physical status.

I t's the age-old adage that all Little League baseball, youth soccer, and elementary-school basketball coaches are supposed to adhere to: Let all the people on the bench see some playing time, regardless of the score or outcome. Everybody plays, everybody has fun.

Now, what if you can't participate? What if you love a sport but are relegated to the sidelines because you have a disability?

Twenty years ago, Janice Herman, who was paralyzed in an automobile accident, faced that issue. Her cousin, Rabbi Dr. Reeve Brenner, came to the aid of Herman and many others in similar situations when he created Bankshot Basketball. This brainchild allows *everyone* to play, regardless of physical status.

"[There is] no sport that wheelchair athletes and people who are able-bodied can really play together without sticking people into wheelchairs," Brenner explains. "There are very few ball-playing sports or activities you can do [on an even playing field] because they are all fast-moving and aggressive. You name it—football, basketball, soccer, tennis—there is always an opponent who is stronger or faster than you. There's never a situation in the same game in which a grandmother goes up against a Michael Jordan-type athlete, a wheelchair athlete, and a 9-year-old. The sports world is missing the huge chunk of non-running, non-aggressive derivative sports."

A Sport Was Born

In the 20 years since Brenner came up with this revolutionary concept of all-inclusionary sports when he was in Israel, Bankshot has blossomed from a backyard game to a national event and a multisport phenomenon. For a hoops junkie like Brenner, basketball was the obvious sport in which to launch his new concept.

With basketball in his blood from his youth in baseball- and Dodgers-crazy Brooklyn and later as a gritty guard at Brooklyn College, the tight shoebox gyms of his childhood and adolescence proved a true inspiration of what would become Bankshot. His high-school gymnasium's low ceilings ultimately led Brenner to the concept of Bankshot.

"Basketball has always been a great love of mine—still is," Brenner says. "My cousin Janice and I actually played basketball together, but then her accident changed that, so the logical thing was to start with Bankshot Basketball."

How It Works

Combining the elements of basketball, billiards, and miniature golf as well as geometry and a little physics, Bankshot came on the sports scene and left people scratching their heads, trying to understand exactly what it was.

"It has been featured in museums of art and science, so there are other elements involved," Brenner says.

With 18 hoops and an additional one used for a tiebreaker, a Bankshot station is reminiscent of the miniature-golf course in your favorite seaside resort. Just like that activity or even a skill-related video game, Bankshot starts off at an easy level. With a straightahead bank shot off a conventional backboard at the first station, the game gets going slowly at first. Participants score varying points, determined by distance and difficulty, for each shot that goes in, and they earn bonuses by hit-

Expanding Horizons

Deptford Township, N.J., recently became the first location of The Bankshot Multi-Sports System, which features three new games: Tennis, Pitch, and Throw.

The Multi-Sports System is based on Universal Design and is intended for participants of all abilities. Players proceed through a course of angled, uniquely configured highly colored Bankboards, banking balls off the Bankboards through hoops and into netted catchers.

ting from all three circles at any given station. During the middle rounds backboards get trickier, calling for wraparound shots and double-backboard ricochets.

"To play basketball you need a ball and a hoop," Brenner says. "You can't fiddle too much with them. To modify the game and make it into a skill-type situation, you can change the backboard to require more difficult trick shots."

Like any new venture, Bankshot took its time to blossom. However, the game's growth has been substantial, yet consistent, over the years. There was no defining moment, like in other sports, that put it on the map. The growth seemed to be more grass-roots in nature, winning people over one player at a time.

"When people saw us at trade shows or read an article about us, that sparked their interest," Brenner says. "There really wasn't one thing in particular that helped us—but the exposure has made a difference.

"The original concept was intended for wheelchair players to compete with no disadvantage," Brenner says. "Name a sport where this is more true than Bankshot. Even in bowling, the fellow in the wheelchair does not have the same advantage as the person outside the chair, yet they can play each other."

As the game grew in popularity, so did the public's interest. Bankshot developed more of a national presence, and companies such as New Jersey-based Electric Mobility, creators of scooters and power wheelchairs, have helped spread the word about the game as well as added to its credibility. But with its growth came more demands on Brenner's time. A published author with a Ph.D., he must balance his time among career, family, and congregation. No small task.

"I wish I could clone myself," Brenner says. "I do have a good, loyal staff to help me. And the game kind of sells itself. I wish I could put in more time and help see it grow."

Worldwide Exposure

Even with Brenner spread as thin as he is, the game continues to grow, now in 22 countries with more gaining interest each year. While Bankshot continues to expand internationally, the sport seems to be on a

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regional level here in the United States. An example was this year's national tournament, held in Deptford, N.J., just outside Philadelphia. The event, which also featured regional competitions prior to the national one, drew a good crowd. However, participants came from just a fraction of the country, with the Middle Atlantic States (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland) well represented. Indiana also had participants.

To remedy this lack of diversity, Brenner plans to hold future national tournaments in areas not yet exposed to Bankshot. Next year it will take place in Salisbury, N.C., showing off the game to the South.

"We're hoping to get the word out to that part of the world to come and participate as it was done in the North," Brenner says. "We didn't have any southern players this year, and it is my hope the exposure will bring people from there. My hope and expectation is that it goes all over the country...."

Brenner introduces other sports into the Bankshot family, including tennis, but the one constant remains inclusiveness. It's a concept Brenner believes is missing in today's society.

"Communities ought to be looking to integrate people, not separate them," Brenner says. "Even the traditional playgrounds with the creepy-crawly slides separate kids. There's hardly an [activity] out there—except for what we've

Bankshot basketball promotes diversity. Anyone who wants to play can—regardless of physical status.

done, certainly nothing involving a ball—that brings populations of people together, that integrates communities. The only thing close is the swimming pool—everyone can get into the pool, but there is no sport that brings everyone together on an even field. That's something we need to improve."

As long as Brenner and Bankshot are around, it is guaranteed everyone will play—and have fun in the process.

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