



NCPA Finals

Purdue edges out Iowa State for 2004 season win.

WRITTEN BY CHRIS RAEHL
PHOTOS BY TERRY HAUSS II

Since the founding of the first college paintball club at the United States Military Academy in 1986, college paintball has continued to grow to be a larger part of the sport. The first college tournament was held in 1993, with the first College Paintball National Championships to follow in 2000. The incorporation of paintball's only national non-profit paintball league and player's association, the National Collegiate Paintball Association, took place in 2001.

This year, college paintball achieved a new milestone with the fifth National Championships event held at a public venue, Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, Florida. In previous years, the National Championships had been held at a paintball field. In 2004, the NCPA followed the movement of other big-name events to public locations. To bring additional publicity and spectator traffic to the event, the NCPA partnered with Orlando's Real Rock 101.1FM radio station and held contests involving the radio's DJs for listeners who came out to the event.

There were 23 regular season events for 2003-2004, starting in September and ending in April. The college league is a 5-man league, and each school's ranking is based on their top four regular season scores, plus double their National Championships score. Since the National Championships count twice as much as any other event, a good showing at Nationals is essential for a school to finish the season with a high ranking.

Going into the event, Iowa State University was ranked #1, followed by the University of Connecticut at #2, Purdue University at #3, Penn State at #4, and

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the University of Illinois at #5. Even with their top ranking going into the event, Iowa State was generally considered a long shot for the win, due to the strength of the teams they had played during the regular season. While UConn, Purdue, Penn State and Illinois had earned their rankings playing in the Midwest and Northeast conferences, generally considered the two toughest conferences in the NCPA, Iowa State's wins came exclusively from playing in the Great Plains conference - a newer, and much smaller, conference with newer teams. The few times during the season that Iowa State had come up against established programs from the Midwest and the Northeast they had not done as well, falling behind both Purdue and Illinois at the Collegiate World Cup, and taking a mere eighth out of nine teams at the Fall NLC Championships.

In addition to the top five, 40 other college teams signed up for the competition. They included several new teams like Texas A&M, Georgia Tech, and Wisconsin Platteville, as well as familiar faces like Illinois State, Clemson and St. Mary's University. Steven's Tech from New Jersey, a frequent participant in the Northeast conference in the late 90's, was also back. While these teams were further back in the rankings and thus a long shot for a season title, they had also turned in good performances at various events and could not be counted out of winning the day and the National Championships title with it.

Illinois State, Grand Valley State and St. Mary's were especially good contenders, having placed second, fifth, and sixth at the National Championships in 2003 with most of their players returning for this year.

The college field did open up a bit with the



"Disney's Wide World of Sports offers superb facilities for a paintball event."



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unexpected withdrawal of #2 UConn from the tournament. UConn's treasurer had failed to submit the paperwork necessary for the school to pay for the trip or book the necessary flights, an error not discovered by the rest of the team until the week before the tournament. Facing a lack of funds and last-minute affairs exceeding \$800/person, UConn was forced to postpone their quest for a National title for another year.

In addition to the college competition, the NCPA resurrected a tradition started in 2002 by also hosting a High School National Championships the same day as the college event. Nine teams signed up for the chance at the title, including teams from New Jersey and Michigan. College and High School divisions would be played entirely on Saturday, so the NCPA also decided to host an Open event including Rookie and Novice divisions on Sunday.

Paintball - Disney Style

Disney's Wide World of Sports offers superb facilities for a paintball event, including paved parking and pristine Bermuda grass playing fields. The location would also host Paintball Sports Promotions' Orlando Cup two weeks later, so the NCPA was able to contract with PSP to have the fields set up two weeks early and also use the same airball fields, supplied by Adrenaline Games. With the generous support of the NCPA's sponsors, including Platinum sponsors Brass Eagle and National Paintball Supply, the NCPA was able to allow college and high school teams to play the event for just \$100 each. The event was play paint only, but prices were especially easy on the college and high school player's wallet, while still providing a spectacular location and setup.

The weather for the event was also spectacular - warm, sunny, but not too hot or humid. Registration and field-walking

the first round was finished by 12:30. One of the biggest concerns of tournament players is always the quality of the referees at an event. To help insure good officiating, the NCPA hired the National Professional Paintball League to conduct a ref certification class on Friday to train any refs who were not already certified, and also offered an industry-leading \$150/day wage for the certified refs. The investment proved worthwhile, with even teams who had not done well complimenting the referee staff at the end of the weekend.

A Unique Schedule

Because the event had been scheduled to run in one day to give teams Sunday to travel and make their Monday classes, the NCPA employed a unique schedule that had also been used for the National Championships the previous two years. If a traditional paintball schedule were used, there would only be time for a semifinal and final round after the preliminaries. With 45 teams, only the top team from each preliminary round bracket plus a few wildcards would be able to advance to the semis, making it extremely likely that a team with an unlucky loss would fail to advance. To alleviate this problem, prelims were split into two rounds. Teams would be seeded into brackets of five. The top two teams in each bracket, plus two wildcard teams, would then advance into the upper division of round two, where they would be split into five brackets of four to play for a spot in the semifinals. Teams who were not in the top 20 after the first round of the preliminaries would be placed in a consolation bracket. Instead of seeding the brackets in the consolation round in the traditional manner, with the first seed team playing the last place seed, the brackets were instead seeded so that the top teams would play each other, then the next four, on down to the last four teams playing each other. This gave teams who were not in the running for the win a chance to play more teams of their own skill level and get in at least seven games while still allowing at least 40% of the teams to advance out of each round and get the event done in one day. Whew!

While this unique schedule was very well the previous year, it proved unduly of the event in 2004. After with seeding teams by hand it NCPA had moved to electronic

2003, in such success. New software was being used for 2004, however, and while it had performed well for other events, the unique schedule the NCPA was using required that new, custom software be written, which apparently did not get fully debugged prior to event.

The first schedules issued had some mistakes, causing a delay while they were fixed, which then led to further delays when some of the hardware went down. The scheduled one-hour lunch break turned into three.

While this delay was annoying for the teams in the winners' bracket, they were playing to win and waited it out. In the consolation bracket, however, where teams were only playing for a few places difference within their own brackets, several teams gave up on waiting for the schedule to be corrected and just played games for fun during the delay, withdrawing from the tournament. While this gave their would-be opponents points for a forfeit, most of those teams who would have rather played more games were left dissatisfied.

After the first round of prelims, most of the expected teams had advanced. Notably missing the cut was #1 Iowa State University, who had failed to win a single game in their bracket. Both of Grand Valley State's teams placed third in their brackets, but lacking enough points to grab a wild-card spot, ended up playing against each other in the top bracket of the consolation round and taking 21st and 22nd place, a disappointing follow-up to their fifth place finish in 2003. Purdue and Louisiana State put two teams into the winner's bracket of round two, with Purdue taking the first and third seeds. Illinois had the second place seed, with UW-Platteville fourth and Penn State fifth. Saint Mary's, Steven's Tech, Illinois State, and Texas A&M pulled the next five seeds, with Navy, Missouri, Michigan Tech, Ohio State, Northern Illinois, Rutgers, Clemson and Embry Riddle also advancing. Illinois State missed advancing two teams when their top squad missed the cut after a penalty for trigger bounce caused them to forfeit their last game.

Round Two

Round two started three hours behind schedule, but there was enough breathing room in the schedule to complete the event before dark. The usual suspects all advanced into the semifinals, including Purdue (with

two squads), Illinois, and Illinois State, who had all made the finals at Nationals for the past three years. They were joined by #4 Penn State and St. Mary's, along with UW-Platteville, Clemson, Texas A & M and Steven's Tech all making their first semis appearance at the National Championships.

As play continued, it became clear that the Midwest conference would maintain their dominance of the final bracket at the National Championships. Illinois continued their winning streak for the day to take the top seed in their bracket, joined by Purdue, Illinois State and St. Mary's, making the fourth year in a row that Purdue, Illinois and Illinois State had made the finals, and keeping Illinois in the running for their fifth straight National Championship title.

In the meantime, play on the high school field had continued to progress through the 8-team round robin bracket. The top four teams moved on to finals, including Celebration, Osceola, and Killowich from Florida and Colts Neck High School from New Jersey.

Celebration and Killowich would get two wins each, but Celebration's flag pull in their loss to Killowich got them the first place finish. Colts Neck beat Osceola for third place, leaving Osceola in fourth - an impressive finish considering they had played with only four players all day. Celebration also demonstrated the co-ed potential of the sport, with girls occupying two of the six spots on the team's roster.

Back on the college field, Purdue had won their first two games, while Illinois State, Northern Illinois and St. Mary's had each dropped one to each other, giving them one win each with the Purdue-Illinois game left to play. To extend their National Champion streak to five



years, Illinois needed to win the game and prevent Purdue from getting the pull, but it was not to be. Purdue dropped some bodies, but otherwise methodically eliminated Northern Illinois and became the second school ever to win the National Champion title. St. Mary's edged out Illinois State by two points for third place.

With Iowa State failing to advance out of round one and UConn missing the event, the first place finish put Purdue into the #2 ranking spot. Penn State's fifth place finish and lead over Illinois in during the regular season was enough for them to grab the #2 ranking, a very respectable finish for a program in only its second year, with Illinois rounding out the top three.

The college league takes some time off for the summer and will start up again in September. The NCPA will be running a nationwide high school league for 2004-2005 as well, with 4 to 5 events in each area over the course of the school year.

Check out www.collegepaintball.com for more information on events coming up near you.



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