

Foosball games raise money for Quigley

Fleming Island event helps shelter

By **MARY MARAGHY**
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A foosball tournament on Fleming Island raised more than \$22,000 for Quigley House, Clay County's domestic violence shelter.

Overall, 75 players, including 48 touring professionals, competed in 11 double-elimination events for open, expert, novice and junior divisions and \$4,000 was awarded in prize money, said organizer Tyler Tornello, president of the Jacksonville Table-Soccer Players Association.

"On a scale of one to 10, it was a 16. I'm thrilled," Tornello said about the 2005 Florida State Table-Soccer Championships Jan. 14-16 at Players Grille and Sports Bar. "A whole lot of people had a whole lot of fun."

Last year's tournament raised about \$16,500 for Quigley House and \$11,400 the year before.

Tornello said he was surprised contingents expected from Canada and California didn't show up but there was one player from France and many from the Carolinas. Also, more than 30 parents and their children competed in a new parent-child doubles competition that was added this year in efforts to promote foosball as clean family fun.

Foosball has been part of European culture for 60 years but in America it was once considered a seedy, back-alley sport reserved for smoke-filled barrooms, said Alan Cribbs, representative of Bonzini USA, a foosball table maker and tournament sponsor.



Cameron Hayes, 8, and his 14-year-old sister, Cassie, play a warm-up game on Friday night. They are part of a family of five that came to the tournament from Winston-Salem, N.C.
MARY MARAGHY/The Times-Union

Rhonda Hayes and 8-year-old son Cameron won the parent-child doubles competition.

"I love foosball," said 14-year-old Cassie Hayes. "It's fun. You just have to keep your eye on the ball. I like being goalie best."

Two or four players play at a table with eight rods that operate miniature aluminum soccer player figures, 11 on 11, including a goalie at each end.

The objective is to turn the rods to make the figures kick a ping-pong-sized ball into the opposing team's goal.

It takes strong wrists, good eye-hand coordination and quick reflexes, said 37-year-old expert Rickey Martin of King, N.C.

Wearing white golfing gloves, he flicked his wrist to fire a ball across the table. Last year, Martin placed second, third, and fourth in events in the expert competition and won back his entry fee, which is always his goal.

"It's a hobby, a fun getaway," Martin said. "I love it. I've been hooked for over 30 years."

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Tyler Tornello adjusts a new table-soccer table to make the grips removable. Some competitors wanted to use their own handles for the tournament.

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But today the game is becoming more of a white-collar sport, said Cribbs, who sponsors many corporate mixers that center around foosball as a novel form of schmoozing.

Like a pool shark carries his own cue stick, serious foosball players travel with their own foosball table handles, which they screw on to the table. Some use gloves or sticky substances like football players use for a better grip as they use 11 little hand-painted die cast aluminum men to move a ping-pong sized rubber ball across the table and in to the opponents' goal slot.

At the tables one night was Chris Hayes of Winston-Salem, N.C., who said he grew up playing foosball at a skating rink. He's spread his love for the game to his family, including his wife, Rhonda, their three children, and his daughter's boyfriend, and all of them competed.

"This is the only tournament that allows kids," Hayes said. "Most tournaments are held in bars, and you have to be 21."



Children were welcome to choose a foosball player to take home as a souvenir from the 2005 Florida Table-Soccer Championships held in Fleming Island.

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