

FOREST PARK REVIEW

HOMETOWN



Strength vs. strength: Side Kicks bouncers Todd Wittlinger and Greg Bahnfleth fare off over the revolutionary Arm Wrestling Machine, which was designed to even out the odds. (Review photo by Tom Johnson)

ARM WRESTLING

New fad muscles into town

By JEFF GATESMAN

Competition and glitter hung in the air like an early morning fog. The competitors, anticipating the warm glow of victory, were being followed by photographers and television cameras. But even the women in evening dress were upstaged by a large four armed machine with bells and lights that could easily pass for an android in a George Lucas film. World class arm wrestling came to Side Kicks last Wednesday night, and it brought all the fanfare and celebration of a major sporting event.

"This is going to be huge," said Dann Niven of Hands Down Promotions, the Chicago-area promoter for the World Class Arm Wrestling Federation. He is planning three to four tournaments a week, and expects to combine some of them with different benefits. The competition is sanctioned by the federation, and professional referees are used, but the revolutionary idea is in the Arm Wrestling Machine itself.

Jack Barringer, 43, of Ames, Iowa, has

built a machine "that takes the controversy out of traditional hand-to-hand arm wrestling by eliminating (the) special techniques" of the competitors; according to Barringer's public relation spokeswoman, Liz Burnstine. "The competitors use only their strength, not fancy hand grips, and no one has an advantage because of arm length." The remarkable features of the machine are that a left-handed person can wrestle a right-hander and that it can accommodate teams of two wrestlers each. Levers connect the competitors so that they are wrestling each other and flashing red lights and a bell announce the winner.

Barringer has been an arm wrestler all his life and said that, until now, there had always been a controversy over hand grips and an individual's build. His search to end this controversy led to the three-year development of his machine, which compensates for both grip and arm length. Sylvester Stallone's movie "Over the Top" was to feature his machine, but it was completed only three



Greg Bahnfleth

'This is going to be huge.'

months ago. Barringer still hopes for a sequel to the movie to showcase his machine.

Mike Scaramella, manager of Side Kicks, who was on hand for the tournament, said that he became interested in arm wrestling after watching Stallone's movie. He had searched for an association that would sanction an event in his bar and decided to have it on April 15th because, "everybody's mad at Uncle Sam, so let's take out our frustration on a machine." He plans on hosting the event every couple of months.

Individual wrestlers competed for prizes and trophies and the chance to move up to regional, state and national competition. Because it is an amateur event, there are no cash prizes. "We treat our business strictly as a sport," Barringer said. Teams consisted of individuals, double and mixed doubles.