

Area wheelchair basketball teams excel at national tournaments

Published: Sunday, April 17, 2011, 9:30 AM



By **Steve Kaminski | The Grand Rapids Press**

The Grand Rapids Wheelchair Sports Association came up short in its bid for a national championship earlier this month.

Three teams in the top six, though, isn't bad.

The Grand Rapids Pacers junior varsity team finished second overall at the National Wheelchair Basketball Association finals, which were held April 6-10 in Denver, Colo.

The Pacers' second junior varsity finished third in the Junior NIT and its adult team took sixth.

"The season was a long one, and in the end, we came out in a good position," said Lee Montgomery, who coaches the adult team. "In the past, the adult team has won a national championship and so has our varsity. Our prep has been coming along well in the program, and this was probably one of the best teams we've had.

"They were ranked No. 1 during the season and finished second at nationals. This puts us on the map, and it will give the kids some bragging rights."

Grand Rapids' junior varsity, which features 6- to 13-year-olds, finished the season 23-2 overall, with its only two losses coming against the Dallas Junior Mavericks. The Junior Pacers completed the regular season 19-0 and entered the eight-team national tournament ranked No. 1.

Dallas beat Grand Rapids 40-38 in overtime in bracket play, then eventually defeated the Pacers 46-32 in the national championship game.



Courtesy photo | Pat Besta

Alex Totte of Lansing shows off the hardware he earned at the wheelchair national championships earlier this month. Totte was named second-team all-tournament.

Area wheelchair basketball teams excel at national tournaments

"We really improved quite a bit and played really well this year and came together as a team," said Pat Besta, who coaches the Junior Pacers. "We had some new kids on the team that learned a lot this year.

"A season like this always helps. You have other kids read about it, hear about it, and they want to play, too. It does open it up a little more this way."

Tanner Gentry of Muskegon was named most valuable player for the NWBA Junior Varsity Tournament, while Pacer teammates Matthew Talbot of Grand Rapids and Alex Totte of Lansing earned first and second all-tournament honors, respectively. Natalie Wright of Sparta made the all-tournament female team.

Grand Rapids' second junior varsity squad entered the tournament ranked seventh before beating a Fort Wayne-based team, 48-35, to finish third. Jill Host of Marne earned the tournament's sportsmanship award, and she and teammate Mary Webster were selected to the all-female tournament team. Rockford's Larry Richardson made first-team all-tournament.

Chris Kommer of the Pacers adult team was named to the all-tournament second team after helping Grand Rapids finish sixth.

"We finished with three teams in the top six in the nation, and I am very proud of the program," Montgomery said. "We are coming up the ladder and giving us some recognition across the country."

Send e-mail to the author: sports@grpress.com

© 2011 MLive.com. All rights reserved.