

March 25-31, 1994/page 1B

Maryland Exiles take rugby crown



Photo by Wayne Moore

A trio of Exiles is taken on by the Shamrocks' Dewey Hooper (right) in the 15th annual St. Patrick's Day Rugby Tournament championship.

By Jen Marsh

It was a studied contrast from the bitter cold and freezing rain that characterized last year's St. Patrick's Day Rugby Tournament, but that was just the weather. It was the same hard-nosed, hood-and-guns rugby March 19-20 that keeps bringing teams back year after year to play in the event sponsored by the Savannah Shamrocks.

The Shamrocks surprised a few people by proving their hosting duties didn't detract too much from the task at hand: playing rugby. They beat Columbia Old Grey, 15-5, the Atlanta Rugby Club, 7-6 and local rival Hilton Head, 20-17 to take the top spot in the green division (second level), but their momentum was quashed by a powerful club that proved its toughness by practicing in some pretty ugly New

England weather. The Maryland Exiles rolled over the Shamrocks in the grand championship, 30-3.

"We were beaten by the better side," said captain John Harrison. "But the tournament went very well. I thought we played some of the toughest teams in the country."

Fifty-two teams, including six college sides, came from all over the United States, from Michigan to Florida, from Wisconsin to New Jersey and many points in between, playing in six division college, two upper levels and three division II levels.

"The main reason we come down for St. Patrick's Day is the fun in the town," said Exiles captain Marc Benson. "But we got plenty of good rugby in. The Savannah tournament is always really nice, and this was a nice end to a good tournament. Our team was led by our tight five. They were superb. That's

what allowed us to dominate the teams this year."

Maryland, playing in an upper level division, reached the championship by defeating the Georgia Junior Selects 15-0, Knoxville by a score of 33-7 and the Cincinnati Wolfhounds, 9-0, to win the gold division (upper level).

The Shamrocks' second side didn't fare so well, getting beaten by the Ogres (made up of Georgia Tech alumni), 31-7; coming back to defeat the RATS (Richmond Area Touring Side) in overtime, 17-12; but then losing to the Blind Pig (Georgia alumni), 35-5.

This is the fifth year that a portion of the proceeds have gone to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and this year the Shamrocks also sponsored a fleet that featured 9-year-old MDA Goodwill Ambassador Seth Lynn.

"I think it was a great opportunity for MDA and Seth, and for the players to get to see one of the children they're supporting," said Nancy Lynn, Seth's mother.

The tournament made a donation of \$3,000 to MDA, which makes about \$7,500 over the five-year period.

"The general feedback from teams that had to travel a long way to get here was very positive," Harrison said.

Added tournament director Steve Keller, "It was great. The only thing missing was the bad weather."

Other division winners were:

The Bulls of Florida defeated the Ogres, 13-7 to win the white division and the Old Boys (30+) championship.

The Southern Gentlemen of Leisure out of South Carolina beat the Midland (Mich.) Barbarians, 18-17 in the black division.

Space Coast (Fl.) beat Lacrosse, (Wis.), 27-7 in the social division.

At the collegiate level, the Georgia College Selects, which featured some players from the Savannah College of Art and Design team, defeated Appalachian State, 8-0.



Photo by Wayne Moore

Two players from the Maryland Exiles move in for a Shamrock sandwich late in the final match's 30-3 loss.