

Alvarado Rules in Montreal

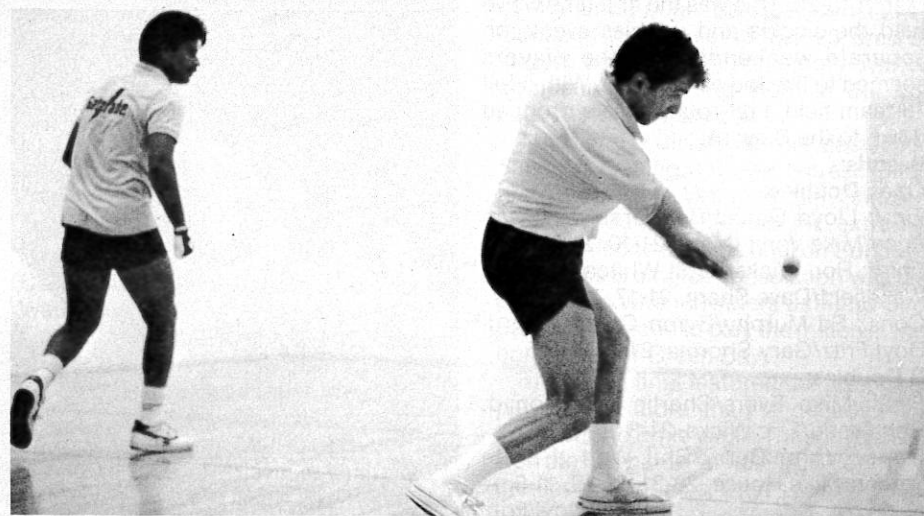
Ayube Upsets Monreal

On his first trip to Canada in eight years, Naty Alvarado felt right at home, controlling John Bike in the final, 21-9, 21-12. With Alvarado relying on his solid, no-nonsense attack as he readies himself for an unprecedented 10th national singles title in Berkeley, the Northeastern fans found plenty to cheer about as their "favorite son," Ken Ayube, had his best-ever pro showing in a long and successful career.

Coming off a weekend tournament win in his hometown of Boston, Ayube looked "drained," both physically and emotionally, during the qualifier and first game of his opening-round match with Poncho Monreal. Understandable, considering Ken won the Boston Open by winning two matches on Saturday, then beat Dave Dohman on Sunday morning, and Charlie Kalil on Sunday afternoon. And that field included some other top names, including Bike, Danny Bell and Danny Armijo. Then, Ken was in Montreal on Tuesday, working his way into the pro draw via the qualifier.

Falling to the No. 2 ranked pro by the respectable 21-10 first-game score was nothing to be upset about. But it was for 38-year-old tourney veteran Ayube. "Well, I knew I could play better," Ken said. "He (Monreal) served real well, but even when he didn't, I wasn't moving him off the short line."

In the second game, a struggling Monreal didn't serve as well, and Ayube never failed in getting the accurate fly-shooter off the short line. Monreal, who said he had been suffering from a bout with "Montezuma's Revenge," after a trip across the border earlier in the week, couldn't make the rally-enders whenever Ayube forced him to retreat after the serve. Boosting his confidence with an early lead, Ayube's emotions were pushing his tired body to behave as if he were a fresh 20-year-old. Building his lead to a 14-5 and then a 19-13 advantage,



Ayube surprised Monreal and Lopez to advance to the semis.

Ayube had his faithful following buzzing with "I told you sos," in regard to the many predictions for an upset. But Monreal wasn't about to give up so easily, and looked for his big serve, the one he has used to magically turn games around throughout his young career.

And he found it. Monreal tied the game at 19 before Ayube tallied his 20th point on a bizarre bounce. What could have, make that "should have," been a back-wall setup for Monreal, stuck in the crotch of the back wall and floor and dribbled out. A deflated Monreal couldn't get back to the front court after chasing two pass shots in time for an Ayube kill. "Yeah!" Ayube exclaimed as he pounded his fists together.

The long rallies, Ayube's trademark for success, had taken their toll on Monreal, but Poncho opened the tie breaker with two quick points on an ace and a kill. Then Ayube fell back into his groove, working the rallies and methodically ending them with a pass shot or high-percentage kill. Monreal called his first time-out when Ayube took the lead at 4-3. He called his second when Ayube tallied three

more for a 7-3 advantage. Desperately looking for the "magic," Poncho regained service and tallied a point. But without "legs," he overhit his next serve to the right for a back-wall setup. Ayube made him pay with a pass before winning the rally, and the match was as good as over.

Even Ayube fans weren't optimistic about Ken's chances against Richard Lopez, who not only breezed through his first round win over Peter Service, 21-6, 21-3, but had defeated Ayube in their only previous outing, in Denver's qualifier in December. And Lopez was coming off wins over John Sabo and Jon Kendler in Atlanta and Columbus, respectively. And Ayube only smiled when asked how he felt, as if to say, "More than a little sore."

But Ayube's out of the "old school." You can't take him for granted and the proverbial match isn't over 'til it's over. After a slow start, Ayube loosened up, got into the flow, and proceeded to make it a match between his right hand and Lopez's left. Considering the probable outcome of such a match, Richard did quite well in the first game. But forced into the deep, left corner time and again, the frustra-

tion mounted and Richard was never in the second game. Ayube moved into his first pro semifinal with a 21-17, 21-6 win.

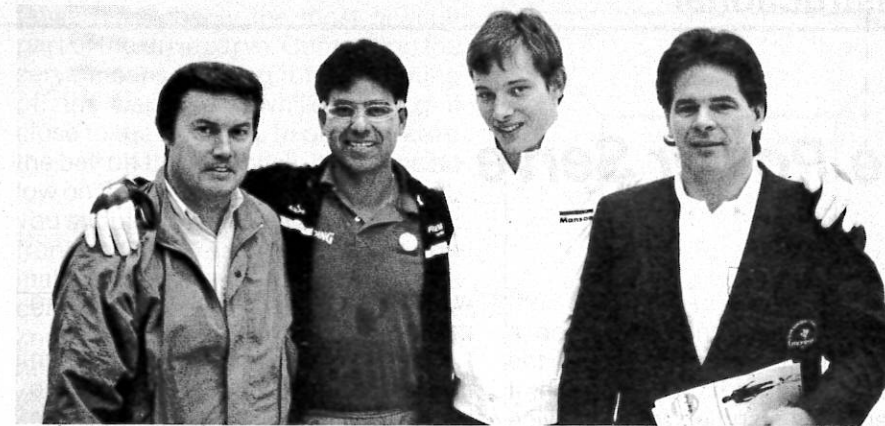
Steamrolling into the semis with Ayube was John Bike, who manhandled Randy Morones in the first round, 21-17, 12-10, and coasted past Dennis "Boom-Boom" Haynes in the quarters, 21-9, 21-16. Whereas Ayube's matches are always closer than the score indicates due to his gut-it-out style of play, Bike's are never as close as the score indicates. If a game in which Bike is playing lasts a half-hour, it's a long one. Bike's philosophy on how the game is to be played is explained this way: "If you're hot, shoot. If you're not hot, shoot 'til you get hot."

In the semis, Bike was hot, and Ayube had finally reached the bottom of his very deep reservoir of human endurance. Plagued with a bone bruise and crack in the skin on his right hand all week, Ayube played the first game against Jon Kendler for third place, lost 21-11, and called it quits. When he took his glove off, his right hand was cracked to the quick.

With tour regulars Fred Lewis, Jaime Paredes, John Sabo, and Tim Labey unable to attend due to numerous circumstances, including injury and job commitments, some of the first-round matches took on a different look with even more meaning. If Haynes beat David Wyrsh in the first round, he would be in the top 12 for the next tournament. Haynes played like he didn't want to qualify, and beat Wyrsh in two, 21-13, 21-16.

Even more crucial was the match between Bell and Armijo. Not only would the winner be in the top 12, the loser would be out of the top 12. Both played their hearts out as Bell pounded while Armijo chased. No slowpoke himself, Bell squeaked the first game out, 21-18, and dominated the second game, 21-10.

Former Lake Forest College teammates Jon Kendler and Charlie Kalil also did battle in the opening round with Kendler overpowering the weary Kalil, 21-8, 21-3. Vern Roberts came back from a 5-1 tie-breaker deficit against Tom Blaikie, to win, 11-5. Surprising no one more than himself, Roberts tallied five aces in the tie breaker. The final first-round match saw Alvarado get used to the court and defeat Dave Steinberg in the process, 21-9, 21-9. Though over-



Jim Barriere and Ed Brennan congratulate Alvarado and Bike.

matched, Steinberg actually played very well, holding his position at the short line and pounding with Alvarado.

In the quarters Kendler came back from a 7-0 deficit in the first game against Roberts to take a 20-15 lead. Then Robert came back and tied the game at 20, before Kendler closed it out. In the second game, Roberts raced to a 9-0 advantage before Kendler outscored him 21-6, for the 21-15 win.

Bell brought the fans to their feet when he handed Alvarado a 21-11 second-game loss to force a tie breaker in their quarterfinal matchup. But Naty was trying to make a point in the tie breaker, forging an 8-0 lead and becoming visibly upset when Bell tallied his one and only point in the 11-1 result.

Kendler said his 21-7, 21-8 semifinal loss to Alvarado was "the worst beating I've ever had."

Alvarado was all business indeed, both in the semis and final. No showmanship, no flashy kills, no dazzling hooks — just straight-forward, power handball. Perhaps in no other year of his career has Alvarado kept his "game" face on throughout the entire year. At 32, and honing up for the nationals, this might also be his most dominating year on the pro circuit.

Though Kendler said he usually has success driving the alleys off Naty's serve, it didn't work in Montreal. Naty was on top of each of Jon's drives, pushing the tall lefty to the opposite side of the court in a hurry or dropping them in the corners for points.

Bike got the same treatment in the final as Alvarado took control from the start of the first game. Forcing weak returns from Bike's right off the

serve, Alvarado did whatever he wanted, including passing Bike on the left.

With the score tied at 10 in the second game, Bike seemed to suffer a lapse in concentration, sending five in a row into the floor, including two fairly easy shots on his left side. From there it was downhill for Alvarado, as he coasted to his ninth straight first-place check on the Spalding/Gatorade pro tour.

Combined with the popular Quebec Open amateur event at Club Sani Sport in Brossard, the pros were treated in grand style by Eddie Brennan, who organized the pro event. Donald Cote' and Allan Pellissier ran the amateur events with pro acumen and everyone had a great time. The sponsors of the event were paired with touring pros on Wednesday evening for a fun round robin, as well as a dinner in downtown Montreal.

Results:

First Round: Naty Alvarado, Hesperia, Calif., d. Dave Steinberg, Portland, 21-9, 21-9; Danny Bell, Quebec, d. Dan Armijo, Albuquerque, 21-18, 21-10; Vern Roberts, Tucson, d. Tom Blaikie, Dallas, 18-21, 21-3, 11-5; Jon Kendler, San Francisco, d. Charlie Kalil, Boston, 21-8, 21-3; John Bike, Austin, d. Randy Morones, Los Angeles, 21-17, 21-10; Dennis Haynes, Los Angeles, d. Dave Wyrsh, San Francisco, 21-13, 21-16; Richard Lopez, Los Angeles, d. Peter Service, Toronto, 21-6, 21-3; Ken Ayube, Boston, d. Poncho Monreal, El Paso, 10-21, 21-19, 11-4.

Quarterfinals: Alvarado d. Bell, 21-9, 11-21, 11-1; Kendler d. Roberts, 21-20, 21-15; Bike d. Haynes, 21-9, 21-16; Ayube d. Lopez, 21-17, 21-6.

Semifinals: Alvarado d. Kendler, 21-7, 21-8; Bike d. Ayube, 21-7, 21-6.

Third Place: Kendler d. Ayube, 21-11, inj. def.

Final: Alvarado d. Bike, 21-9, 21-12.