



The 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, reached new heights with a presenting sponsor for the first time in nearly 20 years.

The Amazon sponsorship allowed the Florida Sports Foundation to reach more youth and adults to be involved in furthering their commitment to exercise, a healthy lifestyle and the importance of teamwork and competition. It helped ensure the message about the value of being active and engaged reaching more prospective athletes while providing fun and fulfilling opportunities for thousands.

For more than 40 years, the Sunshine State Games has brought together young people and adults from across the state for affordable and inclusive activities, while fostering the type of experience that fulfills dreams and furthers performance.

More than 7,000 athletes competed in the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, in over 20 sports from February through June. Athletes ranged in age from five years old in Taekwondo, Figure Skating and Track and Field, to 90-years old in Golf.

Multiple sports were held in four different communities, Alachua, Broward, Clay and Polk Counties showcased some of Florida's finest athletic venues.

2022 Sunshine State Games facilities included the Florida Panthers Ice Den, the practice facility of the Florida Panthers, in Coral Springs, for Figure Skating, the two-year old AdventHealth Field House, in Winter Haven, for Judo and Taekwondo and the internationally-acclaimed Ansin Sports Complex, in Miramar, for Track and Field. The Easton Newberry Sports Complex in Alachua County, and host of Archery, frequently welcomes U.S. National Team and Olympic team members to its location. The Lake Grew at Action Water Sports facility, in Polk County, regularly holds USA Water Skiing events.

For more information about the Sunshine State Games, visit www.sunshinestategames.com or follow the Games on Facebook or Instagram.

Sunshine State Games Busy Month of June Concludes With Championship Sunday

CORAL SPRINGS - To wrap up the final weekend of Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, events during the month of June, 50 Water Polo teams, played more than 100 games, over the course of 35 hours between Friday and Sunday at the Coral Springs Aquatic Center and Boca Raton High School.

The 35 hours included only two hours of a weather delay on Saturday. Also included in the weekend's activities were Fencing in Alachua County and Powerlifting, also in Broward County.

Championship Sunday brought out the best in the eight Water Polo gold medal games. After two days of pool play, with sometimes lopsided scores, the championship games were decided by an average of four points.

In winning its third consecutive Girl's 18 and Under SSG Championship, Sarasota Water Polo (*pictured below*) defeated South Florida Water Polo, 10-9 in the final game.



After having a shot blocked to give Sarasota a would be, two-point lead, South Florida got the ball with :05 remaining. Once the referee threw the ball into the pool, South Florida took a potential game-tying shot from the middle of the pool that was blocked by Sarasota goalie, Sophie Raquel as time expired.

“I could read the shot that was coming,” said Raquel. “So I knew what was going to happen and got the block.”

Sarasota was undefeated in five games over the weekend, winning its final two games by one point, against the silver and bronze medal winning teams. Also undefeated in five games was Team Orlando to win the Men's Open Division gold medal. Team Orlando defeated the Miami Riptides, 12-8, in the Championship Game.

2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, medal winners

12 and Under Coed

GOLD; Hialeah Storm; SILVER: South Florida Water Polo; BRONZE: Miami Whitecaps

14 and Under Coed

GOLD: South Florida Water Polo; SILVER: Miami Riptides; BRONZE: Hialeah Storm

16 and Under Girls

GOLD: Miami Riptides; SILVER: FEC; BRONZE: Orlando Thunder

16 and Under Boys

GOLD: Miami Whitecaps; SILVER: Miami Riptides; BRONZE: South Florida Water Polo

18 and Under Girls

GOLD: Sarasota Water Polo; SILVER: South Florida Water Polo; BRONZE: Orlando Thunder

18 and Under Boys

GOLD: Miami Whitecaps; SILVER: South Florida Water Polo; BRONZE: Miami Riptides

Women's Open

GOLD: Miami Riptides; SILVER: South Florida Water Polo; BRONZE: Orlando Thunder

Men's Open

GOLD: Team Orlando; SILVER: Miami Riptides; BRONZE: MAC Water Polo

Since February, 19 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, sports have been contested, in 14 different Florida cities, with nearly 7,000 of Florida's Finest Amateur Athletes in action.

South Florida Water Polo Rivals Make Their Annual Trip to the Sunshine State Games

CORAL SPRINGS - It's hard to imagine a Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, Water Polo Championships without Riptides Water Polo and South Florida Water Polo.

Besides both of their long histories in the Games, Riptides has six teams playing in the eight divisions and South Florida Water Polo has nine teams, including three in the Men's Open Division.

One of the most consistent teams in the past 10 years has been the Riptides Women's Open team, coach by Carroll Vaughan. Besides a few handfuls of gold medals, the Women's Open team featured Olympic-gold medal winner, Ashleigh Johnson, as recently as 2016.

On the 2022 Women's Open team, Vaughan has another protégé in 16-year old Gaby Montalvo (*pictured at right*), who has spent the last eight months playing on Olympic Development Program teams and was invited to play on the U.S. National Juvenile Team at an International Tournament in Athens, Greece, in August.

"She's following in Ashleigh Johnson's footsteps," said Vaughan.



Montalvo began playing on the Riptides Women's Open team with Vaughan at 15. As a member of the Gulliver Prep Girl's Water Polo team, she gets a double dose of Vaughan's tutelage.

Her Olympic Development Program work has been going on for the last four or five years, according to her father, Mario Montalvo. Her latest process began last September, when she was selected to play for a Florida Olympic Development team. That led to a Southeast Region team spot and a spot on a 12-member National Tournament team in California. Finally, she was invited to a National Team Selection Camps in Irvine, California, in May.

Throw in a spot on the Puerto Rico Women's Senior National Water Polo team to compete in the Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) Water Polo Challenger Cup in Barranquilla, Colombia, in October, 2021. Puerto Rico won the bronze medal in the tournament, with a 15-14 victory over Venezuela.

“That was my first international competition and there’s a big difference,” she said. “The referees allow you to play a little more aggressive. I’m really looking forward to playing in Greece and representing Florida. I know I’ll be there based on my own skills and level of play.”

That’s a lot of water polo in the last nine months for the, “Florida girl, or Miami girl,” as she’s known by her national teammates.

On Saturday, Montalvo played four games at the Coral Springs Aquatic Center. She played two games with the 16 and Under team and two games with the Women’s Open team. She was a vital part of the final two games of the day. The first, in the 16 and Under Division, a 9-8 overtime loss against FEC, where she hit the top bar of the goal, from the middle of the pool, as time expired. She scored two goals in the Women’s Open team 12-7 win over South Florida Water Polo.

“That would have been an impressive shot,” Montalvo said, of her last second hurl. “I’ve been practicing that shot.”

Even with a two-hour afternoon weather delay, pool play wrapped up with the exception of three Men’s Open Pool Play games, beginning at 7:00 a.m. Medal round games begin at 9:30 a.m. with the 12 and Under Coed Division and continue through 4:30 p.m. when the Boy’s 18 and Under Gold Medal game is played.



Powerlifting was held at Lift District Fitness in Margate with athletes competing in squat, bench press and deadlift events. The Men’s Champion of Champions for Powerlifting (all three events) was Jhamali McCalla, of Margate. Michael Jean (*pictured at left*) earned the award for Push/Pull (bench press and deadlift) and the Bench Press Award winner was Darian Bryant, of Sunrise.

Jean, of Pembroke Pines, had the highest Deadlift total with a 600 pound lift. It was a personal best for the well-over 300 pounds Jean. Christopher Kelly, of Naples, matched Jean’s 584 pound deadlift but was unsuccessful at 600.

The Women’s Champion of Champions for the Powerlifting was Paris Isley, of Pembroke

Pines. Winning the award for Bench Press was Angela Hong, from Davie, who at 125 pounds, bench pressed 248 pounds, a world-class accomplishment, according to Powerlifting Sport Director, Robert Keller.

The final day of Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, for the month of June, is Sunday with Water Polo, at the Coral Springs Aquatic Center and Fencing at the Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, in Alachua. The events are free and open to the public.

Also being contested on Saturday is Powerlifting at Lift District Fitness, in Margate, and Fencing at the Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, in Alachua.

Sunshine State Games Water Polo Goalies Stare Down Opponents and Get Big

CORAL SPRINGS - The 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, Water Polo Championships are coinciding with the NHL Stanley Cup Finals and goalies are getting a lot of work.

Tampa Bay Lightning goalie, Andrei Vasilefskiy is getting a lot of attention as one of the top goalies in the NHL. In the fast-moving NHL game, he stares down players flinging hard pucks towards the goal.

This weekend at the Coral Springs Aquatic Center and Boca Raton High School, Sunshine State Games Water Polo Goalies stare down opponents throwing balls toward them with only their head, chest and arms sticking up out of the water.

No headgear, no arm and leg padding, like their NHL counterparts. Just a cap with some ear protection for the Water Polo goalies

The over 100 Sunshine State Games Water Polo games scheduled for this weekend, may only have a 24 minute clock time, but games last for 50 minutes. Water Polo goalies are treading water for the entire game, many times having to play the full game since teams may not have a backup goalie.

“Being a goalie is really hard,” said Sunshine State Games Water Polo Sport Director, Anna Rosen, who also coaches the St. Thomas Aquinas High School Girl’s Water Polo team. “I would never want to play that position.”

Besides being fearless and aggressive, one of the prerequisites for playing the goalie position is height, according to Josh Needleman, the goalie for Florida's East Coast team, who played college Water Polo, at Occidental College in California.

"I'm 6-3 and I'm considered short for a goalie," he said. "The U.S. National Team goalie is 6-7. It's all about the wingspan."

Audrey LaPlant (*pictured below in goal*), of the Seminole Coed 14 and under team and 18 and under Girl's, team stands out among her teammates at 5-9 with plenty of room to grow. She's the starting goalie on the 14 and under team and a backup on the 18 and under team.

"When I first started playing, the coaches saw my height and put me at goalie right away," LaPlant said.



Besides the height and wingspan advantage, she also plays with an aggressive nature. It's the kind of mentality needed when an opponent is four feet away from you and trying to get the ball past you. Especially when the opponent is pump faking a throw and maneuvering from side to side to try and gain an advantage.

"When that's happening, I try to stay still, get big and be the most intimidating player in the pool," she said.

The soon-to-be eighth grader from Ocoee, LaPlante has advanced quickly in the game of Water Polo, having played for just over a year.

“A family friend suggested I give it a try and at first I hated it,” she admitted. “But once I got put in as a goalie, I fell in love with it.”

As a member of both the 14 and 18 under teams, LaPlante returns to action on Saturday and Sunday and has quite a future ahead of her with a goal of playing college Water Polo.

Sunshine State Games, sponsored by Amazon, Water Polo Fulfils Dreams; Attracts Hundreds

CORAL SPRINGS - Hundreds of athletes and their families will descend on Coral Springs and Boca Raton this weekend as the Sunshine State Games, sponsored by Amazon, presents the most significant and fierce competition in the state’s water polo season. Among those competing is 27-year-old water polo goalie Josh Needleman, who is following in his mom’s footsteps as an international athletic competitor.

Fifty (50) teams from across Florida, the southeast, Barbados, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas are ready for physically demanding competition spread over three days, June 24-26. The competition occurs at the Coral Springs Aquatic Center and Boca Raton High School starting at 9 a.m. each day and is open to the public and free of charge. The awards ceremony will occur throughout Sunday afternoon, June 26, at the Coral Springs Aquatic Center. Dozens of local Amazon employees will also be on hand as volunteers for the event after Amazon employee advocacy helped choose the Florida Sunshine State Games for Amazon sponsorship.

“This weekend’s competition and all competitions in the Sunshine State Games, sponsored by Amazon, demonstrate the essential role of sports in our tourism ecosystem,” said Angela A. Suggs, President and CEO of the Florida Sports Foundation, which manages the games. “They are part of our continued record-breaking economic success for Florida and its residents.”

Josh Needleman’s water polo story involves high dreams, hard work, and a commitment to give back. “I started swimming competitively in middle school. When I joined the Olympic Development Program through USA Water Polo, the director said there were future Olympians in this crowd, and I decided that would be me,” he said. He played competitively in college, played for teams in Serbia and Switzerland, and upon returning to Florida, started the Florida East Coast Water Polo Club and coaches the girls’ water polo team at St. Thomas Aquinas High School.

Needleman (*pictured at right*) will compete with the Florida East Coast team in the Men's Open Division at the Sunshine State Games, sponsored by Amazon, leaving shortly after to represent America in the World Maccabiah Games water polo competition in Israel in July. Often referred to as the "Jewish Olympics," the competition was first held in 1932 and is an international Jewish and Israeli multi-sport event held every four years with more than 10,000 athletes from 85 countries.



"My mom, Jill Needleman, won a bronze medal in tennis in the 1990 Pan American Games. She died last year, and this opportunity to honor her by playing on the American team at Maccabiah is a dream come true," he added. "It also highlights that boys and girls playing in the Sunshine State Water Polo Competition this weekend could be future Olympians or international players – the competition is that good!"

The water polo event features boys, girls, and coed competitions in age groups from 10 to 18, along with a men's open and women's open competition. Teams typically average 13 players, with seven competing in the water at any one time – six outfield players and one goalkeeper. Each team is guaranteed four scheduled games at the Sunshine State Games, sponsored by Amazon, with four six-minute quarters per game.

"At the Florida Sports Foundation, we have a history of helping to create international and Olympic athletes," said Suggs. She added that the decision by Amazon to be the official sponsor of all Sunshine State Games for 2022 has brought critical support and attention to the competitions.

"At Amazon, we are proud to set roots in the local communities in which we live and work," said Angelica Santibanez, Senior Manager, Community Engagement for Amazon. "This includes supporting great events in Florida, like the Sunshine State Games that promote youth participation in athletics and STEM. We are looking forward to spending the weekend at the Sunshine State Games and continuing this partnership in the future."

The public is invited to experience first-hand the excitement and grueling endurance in the water polo competition of the Sunshine State Games, sponsored by Amazon. For more information, go to www.sunshinestategames.com/waterpolo.

Sunshine State Games Table Tennis Athletes Earn Ranking Points at Polk County Festival

LAKELAND - In the quick reaction, back and forth sport of Table Tennis, where a 1 ½ inch ball comes toward players across a nine-foot table, at speeds as high as 60 mpg, there's more to it than what goes on at the table. There's a behind the scenes numbers game going on, known mostly by athletes themselves.

It's a number that defines them and drives them to further achievements.

The 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, Table Tennis Championships featured 15 singles events with competition level divisions beginning at 1325 and advancing to 2500. Players earn points playing within their division or playing in higher level divisions.

"Lower rated players can play in any events above their rating," said Ray Spann, the SSG Tournament Certified Referee. "If a 1300 rated player beats a 2000 rated player, it will give them a significant jump in their rating. It seldom happens but it can."

Besides a jump in ratings, Spann said some athletes also want to have the experience of playing a higher rated player to see how they do leading players to venture into several different rating divisions.

It was a good weekend for Gerry Garcia and Juliana Milanov (*pictured below*), two players ranked in the 1700s and lower, who registered to compete in skill level divisions higher than their ratings.



Garcia, from Orlando, with a 1710 rating, played in the U1800, U1875, U2100 and 50+ division. He won bronze medals in the U1800 and U2100 Divisions, beating two players with a higher rating in the U2100 Bracket. Wins against higher ranked players earn positive points toward a ranking, while losses against lower rated players decrease the rating.

"I haven't played in a tournament like this in a couple of years and I beat players higher than me," Garcia said excitedly.

Garcia defeated Maria Hennen, of Bradenton, who was ranked 55 points higher than him,

to gain 13 points. A win over Conrad Fisher, of Palm Harbor with a ranking 17 points higher than Garcia, earned him 10 points. His two losses in the bracket were against higher rated opponents, so he didn't lose any points.

Juliana Milanov, of Winter Garden, entered to play in eight divisions to gain points and increase her rating of 1309.

She spent the better part of the last two days in the Simpson Park Community Center waiting for her name to be called for a match.

"it's a combination of improving your game and luck," she said. "The competition is fierce to begin with and there's other people besides me coming to improve their ratings. Yesterday was not fantastic. Today, I'm killing it. There are so many variables."

Her Sunday proclamation of "killing it," earned her the gold medal in the U1575 Division. She played in the U1800 Division and scored a win over a player with 1700+ rating.

With a rating of 2146, Aroon Klungthong, of Tampa, was the highest rated player in the weekend of Sunshine State Games Table Tennis. He was the gold medalist in the U2500 Division on Saturday.

The next highest division, U2300 was won by 13-year old Steven Eliass, of Oviedo. Eliass won a silver medal in the U2200 and the bronze in the U2500.

Fresh off this weekend's success, Eliass will compete in the US Table Tennis National Championships, in Fort Worth, Texas, July 2-7.

On the second of two days of Taekwondo at the AdventHealth Field House, Black Belt athletes took to the mats for Forms and Sparring events.

Forms Grand Champions were crowned in the 10-17 and 18+ age groups. The 10-17 year old Grand Champion was 12-year old Christopher Foulkes, of Fort Lauderdale. His gold medal winning performance also earned him a \$200 scholarship for further training. The 18+ Grand Champion was Michael Bugarin, from Sebring.

The Sparring Grand Champion was won by 18-year old Benjamin Mach, of Pinellas Park.

The 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, continues next weekend with the

Water Polo Championships and 43 teams competing, June 24-26, in Broward County, along with Powerlifting, June 25. Registration is still open through June 22 for the Fencing Championships, in Alachua County, to be held June 25-26 .

Sunshine State Games Martial Arts Takes Center Stage in Polk County

WINTER HAVEN - It was a two for one special of Martial Arts at the AdventHealth Field House in Winter Haven Saturday for the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon.

Over 400 athletes were in action competing in Judo and Taekwondo on six taekwondo mats and two judo mats. Judo offered Kata (Forms) and Shiai (Sparring) events and Taekwondo featured Poomsae (Forms), Goypka (Breaking) Weapons and Gyorooigi (Sparring) competition.

In a Sunshine State Games Taekwondo first, Family Poomsae competition was offered and seven families took advantage of the opportunity on Father's Day Weekend.

"I was looking at how our event matched up with Father's Day Weekend and kids want to do something special with their dads," said Taekwondo Sport Director, Master James White. "That's what Father's Day is all about, doing something with your family. People are talking about next year that didn't participate this year."



Two medal winning families in the World Class Black Belt Division agreed with White's sentiments as two fathers competed with their children.

"This is my Father's Day present," said Anthony Perri, of St. Petersburg (*middle in photo*), who competed with his daughter Savannah and son, Aiden. "There's no need for them to do anything else for me."

Also taking advantage of the father and sons opportunity was Eric Glinsboeckel, also of St. Petersburg, along with his sons, Ethan and Julian. The Glinsboeckel's were bronze medalists. Robert Young and his daughter Courteney, and son Billy, competed in the Open Color Division, where black belt athletes could pair with other belt color athletes.

The 2022 Most Outstanding Taekwondo School Award went to Ferkile's Taekwondo, in St. Petersburg. Ferkile's Taekwondo earned the award for winning the most gold medals in Junior Division Forms, Breaking and Sparring events.

On the other end of the AdventHealth FieldHouse, Judo legacies continued and others were created as the annual Junior and Senior Outstanding Male and Female Athletes were awarded.

Earning the Junior Most Outstanding Female was Amaris Bell, of Pembroke Pines, and a member of Budokan Judo. The Most Outstanding Male in the Junior Division was Kevin Garcia, a member of the Mambi Judo Club in Tampa.



The Most Outstanding Senior Female was Mackenzie McPherson, of Miramar, also a member of Budokan Judo. The Male Most Outstanding Athlete was Chris Cecere, of Venice, a member of Gator Tens for Life (GTFL) Judo.

The criteria for the Most Outstanding Athlete Awards include “clean technique and most wins and ippons (a clean throw of an opponent landing flat on their backs), “according to Hector Estavez, the Chief Referee.

On hand assisting his father, the Judo Sport Director, Ricardo Menendez, was former Sunshine State Games Most Outstanding Athlete, now 24-year old Alejandro Menendez. Alejandro was onsite creating competition pools, serving at the official's table and coaching members of the Falcon Judo Team.

In 2016, 19-year old Alejandro was named the Outstanding Senior Male Judoka after winning four matches en route to the gold medal in the Men's Shiai Advanced division, 60.1kg-66kg weight class. At that time he had competed in two Pan American Judo Championships and the Jr. World Judo Championships. Upon his graduation from South Miami Senior High School, Menendez was invited to compete in Japan and has since traveled to compete in Abu Dhabi, France, Brazil and many other countries.

“I love to compete and have been in judo since I was four years old, Menendez said. “But I enjoy using my platform to help others advance in the sport of Judo.”

At the Cleveland Heights Golf Course, the low score of the day was turned in by Robert Mackey, of Tampa, with a 73, to win the 70-74 age group gold medal. But the star of the day was 92-year old Dick Cheney, of Winter Haven, who was presented with he 2021 Sunshine State Games Male Athlete of the Year Award.



In winning the 2021 Gold Medal in the 90+ age group, Cheney (*pictured at left*) became the first 90-year old athlete to compete in the 42 year history of the Sunshine State Games. His performance earned him a qualification to the 2021 Florida Senior Games, where he won another gold medal, with a 9-hole score of 47.

Cheney and 27 other golfers endured 18 holes at Cleveland Heights Golf Course in the well above 90 degree temperatures, before an afternoon thunderstorm rolled in. The low women’s score went to Kathey Milligan, of Bartow, with an 86.

Table Tennis at the Simpson Park Community Center, in Lakeland, featured eight different skill level competitions Saturday. Winning two medals each in the two highest skill levels Saturday was Aroon Klunthong, of Tampa. the gold medalist in the U2500 Division. Klunthong was a bronze medalist in the U2200 Division. Steven Eliass, of Oviedo, won a silver medal in the U2200 Division and won a bronze in the U2500 Division.

Table Tennis athletes return to the Simpson Park Community Center on Sunday, beginning at 9:00 a.m., for seven skill level divisions, including the Open Singles Division, the most competitive of all divisions, with 14 players in action.

Sunshine State Games Features Four Sports In Polk County This Weekend

TALLAHASSEE - The focus of the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, shifts to Polk County this weekend, with four sports being contested in Central Florida.

The AdventHealth Field House hosts Judo and Taekwondo, with Judo on Saturday only and Taekwondo on Saturday and Sunday. It’s the first time, the AdventHealth Field House, that opened in January, 2020, has hosted a Sunshine State Games event.

Highlighting the June 17-19 Sunshine State Game, presented by Amazon, Weekend

2021 Sunshine State Games Athlete of the Year to be Honored

Golfer Dick Cheney, of Winter Haven, will be awarded his 2021 Sunshine State Games Male Athlete of the Year on Saturday morning, at the Cleveland Heights Golf Course.

Cheney became the first 90+ year old Sunshine State Games athlete last year, when he shot a 98 to win the gold medal in the 90-94 age group. That performance was a qualifier for the 2021 Florida Senior Games, where he won another gold medal with a nine-hole score of 47.

He will be back on the course Saturday at Cleveland Heights, competing once again in the 90-94 age group. Cheney joins the Miramar Mermaids Athletes with Disabilities Artistic Swim Team as the 2021 Sunshine State Games Athletes of the Year. The Mermaids Coach, Grasey Noriega, accepted the award, on Saturday, June 4 at the Artistic Swimming competition, held at Gandy Pool, in Lakeland.

Taekwondo Family on the Mats at AdventHealth Field House

While scrolling through the athlete database of more than 250 Taekwondo athletes, there are plenty of the same last names. It's a sport where brothers and sisters are often in the same program.

What's not often found is a whole family registered to compete, but that's the case with the St. Petersburg Glinsboeckel family.

Mom and Dad, Eric and Johanna, have registered to compete with their 11-year old twin sons, Julian and Ethan.

Eric began competing in Taekwondo when he moved to the U.S., from Germany, in 1987. He continued through 1997, "when life started getting in the way."

Julian and Ethan have been involved in Taekwondo for over five years and have achieved black belt status along with their dad. It's mom, Johanna, who is the newcomer of the family.

"She's just started about six months ago," Eric said. "She used to compete in Karate and decided to join the rest of us. She's getting there and is now a green belt."

The Glinsboeckel's mostly compete in local tournaments and within the state, but recently ventured to Las Vegas for the U.S. National Tournament.

"It's something that's a lot of fun to do with the boys," Eric said. "They get to see mom and dad competing also."



Ultimate Returns to Plantation Sports Complex in Fleming Island

In the first of two weekends of Ultimate in Clay County, it was the Weird team earning the gold medal. While officially listed as from Pensacola, Weird had a collection of players from various Florida cities including Tallahassee and West Palm Beach.

After winning three games in pool play on Saturday, Weird won a semi-final bracket game against the Jacksonville Jackpot, 8-7, and followed with a 10-8 win over B-Unit, from Gainesville, for the gold medal.

The second weekend of Ultimate features seven teams competing in the Men's Division. The gold-medal winning El Nino team, from Oakland Park, returns to defend its championship from 2021. El Nino was undefeated in five games at the 2021 Sunshine State Games.

Table Tennis and Judo Return to the Games

For the first time since 2019, Judo and Table Tennis will be held in the Polk County Festival.

Judo begins at 10:00 a.m. Saturday morning, at the AdventHealth Field House, in Winter Haven. Table Tennis will be played at the Simpson Park Community Center on Saturday and Sunday beginning at 9:00 a.m., with athlete check in beginning at 8:30 a.m.

After playing Pickleball last weekend in Green Cove Springs, Teri Jordan, of Bradenton, will be playing with another kind of paddle at Table Tennis.

While most table tennis athletes are of adult ages, 13-year old Steven Eliass, of Oviedo, is competing in four 2000+ levels and the Men's Open. Eliass won the 13 and under division at the 2022 U.S. Table Tennis Association Southeast Regional Qualifier, in late May, at the Broward Table Tennis Club, in Hollywood. He took second place in the 15 and under

division and advanced to the quarterfinals in the Men's Open. With the performance, he qualified for the U.S. Table Tennis National Championships, in Fort Worth, Texas, in July.

Sunshine State Games Archer Continues Success from Youth to College

NEWBERRY - At the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, Archery Championships, held at the Easton-Newberry Archery Complex, nearly 80 archers, ranging in ages from under 10 to almost 90, lined up and shot from three distances in the 900 Round Sunday.

From 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., the archers battled through the heat and humidity, wind and a few rain drops. Through it all, 19-year old Alicia Aviles, of Tamarac (*middle in photo*), emerged with the overall high score, an 864 of a possible 900, to win the gold medal in the Adult Women's Freestyle event.

When Matt Hall was informed he shot the top men's score of 862, but was "beaten by a girl," for the top overall score, he shrugged it off immediately.



"That's ok," he said. "She's one of my students."

Whatever Hall has been doing to mentor her on the archery range is obviously working.

Aviles began shooting in the Sunshine State Games at 12 years old in 2015. She's home for the summer, from Mount Marty University, in Yankton, South Dakota, where she is a member of the school's archery team, on scholarship, and is coached by Olympic archer Vic Wunderle.

Aviles and her Mount Marty teammates are fresh off a sixth place finish at the Collegiate National Championships, where 47 teams and over 500 athletes competed at the end of May. Mount Marty won the Mixed Recurve National Championship defeating Texas A&M.

Over the last four years in the Sunshine State Games, Aviles has seen her Freestyle scores rise from 674 in 2019, as a 16-year old. to the overall high score today of 864.

To begin the day at the Easton Newberry Archery Complex, Florida Sports Foundation President Angela Suggs announced the creation of the Tim Austin Excellence in Archery Award to be awarded beginning in 2023. The Award will honor the many years of service provided by the late Tim Austin, of Gainesville, who was the Archery Sport Director for the Sunshine State Games and Florida Senior Games.

On the final day of Pickleball at Ronnie Van Zant Memorial Park, in Green Cove Springs, Mark Attwood, of The Villages, just missed the Pickleball “Triple Crown,” of winning Men’s Singles, Men’s Doubles and Mixed Doubles.

On Friday, he won the Men’s Singles 65-69 gold medal. He teamed with Bill Harris, on Saturday to win the Men’s Doubles 60-64 age group gold medal, but was thwarted in his Triple Crown effort by his Men’s Doubles teammate.

Attwood and Lisa Sullivan won the silver medal, while the gold was awarded to Harris and Wendy Bledsoe, all from The Villages, in the 55-59 Mixed Doubles age group.

Sunshine State Games Paddler Builds His Own Competition Kayaks

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - Mark Nye surveyed his collection of handmade kayaks on Saturday morning and picked one out to compete in the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, Canoe Kayak Sprint Races on Black Creek, in Middleburg. The Fleming Island



kayaker lives minutes away and paddles the creek often. He turned in a time of 1:40.42 in the 200 meter sprint race, to edge Lloyd Reeves, in a competitive heat and win the gold medal in the K-1 Men’s Event, Vet 1 Division (60 and over). It was the second fastest time of all kayakers at the Middleburg Boat Ramp.

Nye (*pictured at left*), who settled in Fleming Island, after retiring from the Navy and being stationed at Cecil Field in Jacksonville, took up kayaking after towing one behind his sailboat while out in the waters of the Jacksonville area.

“At some point I began to kayak more and sail less,” he said. It’s great exercise and it sure beats running on a hot day.”

Besides his competitive paddling in Florida Competitive Paddlers Association races, the association of which he is the Vice President, Nye likes to explore the waters of Florida in his kayak.

One of his most memorable journeys was paddling from Silver Springs north to the St. John’s River. For those not in the know, the St. John’s River is an oddity since it flows south to north. He accomplished the feat over the course of the summer of 2017.

The approximately 60 mile feat was accomplished in stages using a bicycle, the kayak and his truck. Nye would leave the bike at his destination, chained to a tree, then take the kayak in his truck ,to his starting point. After paddling to the bike, he chained the kayak to the tree and rode the bike back to his truck.

“It was a good day workout,” Nye said.

His travels also bring him out of state as he competed in the U.S. Canoe Association Marathon National Championships, in August 2021, in Warren, Pennsylvania. Its wasn’t unusual for him to race in multiple races at the event, but in what boats.

“I built three different boats, designed for three different races, on three different days,” Nye said.

Over the three days, Nye raced a total of 37.5 miles (12.5 miles each). His times in the three races, K-1 Touring, Sea Kayak and Unlimited, fell in between 1 hour, 42 minutes, 11 seconds and 1 hour, 47 minutes, 44 seconds.

As he walked to his truck to leave the Middleburg Boat Ramp, he told his fellow racers, “It’s back to the storage unit to put away the boat.”

No doubt, Mark Nye will make another selection for another day, depending on whether it’s for competition or exploring.

Sunshine State Games Provides New Opportunities for World Class Athlete and Coach

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - To find Teri Jordan playing Pickleball in the Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, in the remote Clay County location of Ronnie Van Zant Memorial Park, one would never know the journey taken to get to this point in her life.

Since moving to Bradenton in 2020, she has been a regular in the Florida Senior Games and Sunshine State Games playing Basketball, Pickleball and Table Tennis. She has competed in the 5K and 10K Time Trials Cycling events, thrown the discus, javelin and shot put at Track and Field meets and even played Cornhole in the 2022 National Senior Games.

Before her retirement, Teri Jordan (*pictured at right*) was recognized by Penn State University as “one of the country’s most outstanding pioneer women in track and field.”

With June, 2022, being the 50th Anniversary of the passing of Title IX, giving equality and equity to women in sport, Jordan experienced athletics first hand in high school and college.



She ran with the boy’s track and field team at Riley High School in Kansas until her Junior year. After a fourth-place finish in the Junior Olympics, the school created a girl’s track and field team.

Even though she was offered a scholarship to a small school in Omaha, Nebraska, Jordan decided to stay close to home and run track at Kansas State University. She also chose her home state to further develop her skills under the tutelage of U.S. Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association Hall of Famer, DeLoss Dodds.

She was Kansas State’s first woman to earn All-American status in track and field winning the AIAW national championship in the mile run in 1972. She had one of the best seasons in school history in 1976 winning the Big Eight Conference indoor 880, mile and two mile, also earning the outdoor title in the two mile that year. She also earned All-American honors in the two-mile run in 1976, finishing second in the nation.

“When he was inducted into the Hall of Fame, DeLoss Dodds said I was the best girl he ever coached,” Jordan said.

Jordan was the Women’s Head Track and Field Coach at Penn State University from 1984-99. From 1999-2019 she served as the Coordinator of Disability Programming and Assistant Coordinator of the Multi-Sport Complex on the Penn State campus.

She was inducted into the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame in 2002 and has traveled the world as an athlete and coach. Jordan reached the pinnacle of both at the 1976 Olympic Games, in Montreal as an athlete and the 2004 Olympic Games, in Athens, Greece as a coach of the Paralympic team.

“I’m very fortunate to have done the things I’ve done through athletics,” Jordan said. “Not bad for a farm girl from Leonarville, Kansas, a town of 450 people. And that includes cats and dogs.”

Now she’s continuing her athletic career in both of Florida’s Olympic-style Sports Festivals, the Florida Senior Games, as a 50 and over athlete, and the Sunshine State Games, “just for fun,” she admits.

She won the 65-69 age group Women’s Singles Pickleball gold medal Friday in Green Cove Springs and will compete in Women’s Doubles on Saturday and Mixed Doubles on Sunday.

“I do it all for the glory to God,” she said. “Whether it’s through running, or taking advantage of these opportunities to provide fun, competition, or to make new friends. They are goal-oriented programs and I’ve set goals for myself to improve in Cycling and Pickleball to compete in the 2023 National Senior Games.”

Jordan was inspired to continue her athletic career by her mother, who was a Senior Games athlete in Kansas, to get involved in the Florida Senior Games in 2020, when she retired and moved to Bradenton.

“She didn’t get started until she was 66 years old and ran in the 100, 200 and 400 meters until she was 87,” Jordan said of her mother. “She tried to get me involved once I turned 50 but I didn’t want to admit I was 50 at the time.”

Jordan’s commitment to athletics was obvious Friday morning as she was the first athlete at Ronnie Van Zant Memorial Park ready to go more than an hour before women’s singles matches started.

That commitment started at an early age for Jordan and has provided a lifetime of memories already. She has plenty of opportunities ahead of her through amateur sports opportunities like the Florida Senior Games and Sunshine State Games.

The 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, continues Saturday with five sports. Canoe/Kayak, Pickleball and Ultimate will be contested in Clay County, Archery in Alachua County and Water Skiing in Polk County.

Sunshine State Games Artistic Swimming Coaches Have a Lifetime of Memories and More to Come

LAKELAND - In recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the passing of Title IX, in June, 1972, the Sunshine State Games salutes the coaches of the Gainesville Gaviatas Artistic Swim Team, who all continued their artistic swimming ventures while attending college.

Head Coach Crystal Motes and coaches Katy Alexander, Sarah Cooke and Grace Downey (*pictured below L-R*), all participated in the Sunshine State Games in their youth and competed in the 2022 Games, in a Open Division Team Routine.

It's safe to say, the Gaviatas coaches have made a difference in the Florida Artistic Swimming community and continue to lead by example.



Only one of the four was a scholarship athlete, Sarah Cooke, who attended the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio, Texas. Crystal Motes and Grace Downey swam for a club team at the University of Florida, as did Katy Alexander at the University of Richmond.

“It worked out well because I could continue to swim and focus on academics,” said Alexander, who majored in Chemistry at Richmond and earned a Master’s Degree in physician’s assistant studies at Wake Forest. “There were programs for both at Richmond.”

Growing up in the Tampa Bay area and swimming for the Suncoast Waterworks team, Crystal Amsinger, at the time, always wanted to attend the University of Florida. She swam in competitions at the pool where she now serves as the head coach of the Gaviatas.

“It was a bonus they had a synchro program at UF,” said Motes, who earned a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and Health Science and a master’s degree in Occupational Therapy. “Even as a club team, we competed against varsity teams at the collegiate national tournaments and did well. We were always the number one club team.”

The quartet of former Sunshine State Games artistic swimmers are in their first year of coaching the Gaviatas and Alexander admits it’s a challenge.

“We’re making a lot of changes, hopefully for the good,” she said. “We upped the choreography and a lot of other new things. We’re trying to build cohesion and confidence while instilling discipline and hard work at the same time.”

The 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, seemed to show the hard work is paying off as the 20 Junior Olympic members of the team combined to earn the annual Mary Rose High Point Award in that division.

“They did great,” Motes said. “All three team routines won the gold medal and we won two golds in duets and solos.”

To wrap up the weekend of Artistic Swimming at the Gandy Pool in Lakeland, the coaching staff dove into the water themselves and continued their own Sunshine State Games success, winning an Open Division Team gold medal. They were joined by Caroline Pridgen for the routine.

Even though they’re spending more time on the pool deck coaching these days, it all came back to them once they hit the water, Motes said.

“It was like riding a bike,” she said. “I was impressed how quickly things came together. We developed the routine about a month ago at the regional tournament in Stuart and practiced it once before we got to Lakeland.”

Hopefully, the stories and experiences of the coaching staff will motivate current Sunshine State Games artistic swimmers to continue their endeavors in the pool.

Sunshine State Games Provides Family Travel Opportunity for Tallahassee Swimmers

GAINESVILLE - Peruse the Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, results of the last 42 years and you'll find a lot of the same last names. Over the last four decades, Florida's annual Olympic-style Sports Festival for athletes of all ages has provided an opportunity for a summer family outing.



In 2022, you can count the Ekk family, from Tallahassee, to that long list.

For this weekend's Sunshine State Games Swimming Championships, at the Dwight H. Hunter Northeast Pool, in Gainesville, Dennis and Elizabeth Ekk, packed up the family vehicle for their three children to compete with the Area Tallahassee Aquatic Club (ATAC).

Through Saturday, it has been a successful road trip for Bella (*center in photo*), Ethan (*right*) and Owen Ekk (*left*). It's a road trip the family has taken since 2017.

Bella Ekk (*middle in photo*) is a 16 year old Junior to be at Tallahassee's Chiles High School. Ethan Ekk (*right in photo*) is a 15-year old sophomore to be at Chiles and Owen Ekk (*left in photo*) is a 13-year old middle school student at Deer Lake Middle School. Through Saturday, the Ekks combined to win 15 gold medals in the 16 events they swam.

"We just try to feed and water them," said their mother, Elizabeth Ekk. "They're pretty self-motivated."

While the Ekks did not compete in the 2021 Sunshine State Games, in 2019, they combined to win 16 gold medals in 22 events they registered to swim.

Even in winning three gold medals in three Saturday events, Ethan Ekk admitted his times in two events were a couple of seconds off of his best times.

"I wasn't prepared and not in the right mind set," said Ethan. "Our coaches put us through some hard practices leading up to this weekend and I was tired."

While Bella still has two years of high school ahead of her and Ethan has three, they are already looking ahead to what's next in their swimming careers.

Being the oldest, Bella has begun to think about what lies ahead for her in and out of the pool.

“I’d like to make it to a college to swim,” she said. “But at this point I have no idea where that might be.”

Their ATAC coach, Terry Maul, was the head coach of at Florida State University from 1975 to 1993 is a key to their success, Elizabeth Ekk admits.

“He knows the system and he knows the kids,” she said. “He approached us several years ago about them swimming full time, but we weren’t ready. Now we’re a full-time swimming family.”

While they keep a 24-hour week schedule of swimming practices, the three Ekks don’t shun their studies as all keep 4.0 and higher grade point averages, while staying grounded as a family.

“We have a house on Compass Lake west of Tallahassee and they are able to play all kinds of water sports,” said Elizabeth Ekk. “There’s wakeboarding and sea-doods and other things to keep being in the water fun for them.”

Before they all head back to school in August, there’s a couple of meets on the horizon for Bella, Ethan and Owen. The ATAC team hosts a meet in Tallahassee at the end of June and in late July, the family will pack things up for the USA Swimming Futures Championships in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Like many families before them in the Sunshine State Games since 1980, the Ekk family is using the Games as a stepping-stone for further accomplishments. They all have their eyes on swimming in college but there’s also an eye on future Olympic Games.

It’s been done before with Florida-based athletes like Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Ryan Lochte. Keep an eye on Bella, Ethan and Owen Ekk.

June is Sunshine State Games Month

TALLAHASSEE - Since 1980, the summer months, especially June, has Florida’s amateur athletes abuzz with the variety of Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, events

taking place.

During the month of June, 15 sports will be contested in 14 Florida locations. The first weekend of June dives into the water in Gainesville and Lakeland with two of the Games original sports, Artistic Swimming and Swimming.

More competitions follow on the successive three weekends in Alachua, Broward, Clay and Polk counties. After this weekend's schedule of events, six sports have been held, since February, with over 2,200 individual athletes, and 22 teams in action.

Athletes can visit the individual sports pages on www.sunshinestategames.com for competition and registration information or go to the blue "Register Now," button on the top right corner of the website, to go directly to the registration website.

Info Athletes "Need To Know"

As the upcoming events draw near, weekly updates will be sent out to registered athletes and prospective athletes with updates. In the "need to know," category for this week, please make note of the following....

Taekwondo offers Family Event

The Sunshine State Games Taekwondo Championships is offering a new event this year, a Family Open or Family World Class Poomsae event. The Open Division may have two to eight family members that combine color and black belt family members to present a color belt form of their choice.

Family trophies will be awarded for first through fourth place, along with individual medals. The event will be held on Saturday, June 18, so participants can compete in other events. Visit www.sunshinestategames.com/taekwondo for more information. Over 200 athletes have registered to compete at the 2022 Sunshine State Games Taekwondo Championships.

Two Sports, Two Pools, Two Cities – June 3-5 Weekend Preview

Beginning on Friday morning, Artistic Swimmers will be diving into the Gandy Pool in Lakeland with the Junior Olympic Division at 8:30 a.m. Saturday features the Intermediate and Athletes with Disabilities Divisions and Sunday wraps up with the Novice/Open/Masters Divisions.

Artistic Swimmers from 15 teams, spanning the length of the state from Tallahassee to Key West, will be in competition. At the end of each day, the Mary Rose High Point Trophies

will be awarded to teams in the Novice, Intermediate and Junior Olympic Divisions. The late Mary Rose, of Orlando, was the coach of the Orlando Loreleis team, who is among the teams this weekend, and the original Artistic Swimming Sport Director of the Games.

Swimmers age in range from five-year old, Zoe Chimedza, a member of the Miramar Mermaids team, to the four members of the all-60+ Lakeland YMCA Flamingos Masters Division team. SSG Artistic Swimming Sport Director, Lorraine Valerino will do a team routine on Sunday with Piper Mislovic, Lynn Heil and Laural Cain.

On Saturday, the Miramar Mermaids Athletes with Disabilities team will be awarded with the 2021 Sunshine State Games Female Athletes of the Year Award. The seven-member team, coached by Grasey Noriega, performed a two-minute team routine at the 2021 Games in Gainesville. five members of the team return for the 2022 Games.

At the Dwight H. Hunter Northeast Pool, in Gainesville, approximately 400 swimmers, representing 11 teams will be on the starting blocks beginning on Friday afternoon, with races continuing through Sunday afternoon.

Among the swimmers are a quartet of brothers from the Area Tallahassee Aquatic Club, who have quite a list of accolades. Nathan, Stuart, Hanson and Chapman Higdon, range in ages from 10 through 19. Combined, the brothers will swim in 22 events. The three oldest, are among the top 10 times in the 100-meter freestyle, butterfly and backstroke.

Nathan, 19, currently swims at Lees-McRae College, in Banner Elk, NC. Stuart, 18, earned the Tallahassee Democrat's Big Bend Swimmer of the Year Award and will attend LSU on a swimming scholarship. Hanson, 16, is a student at Maclay School in Tallahassee and competed in the State Championships for the swim team. Chapman will swim in six events in the 10 and under age group.

Stars of Tomorrow Shine at the Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon

CORAL SPRINGS - The stars of tomorrow begin their sports journey at the Sunshine State Games.

Athletes as young as four and five years old were in competition at the Figure Skating and Track and Field Championships on Sunday. The Sunshine Summer Kickoff Lacrosse Championships had three teams in an 8 and under Division.



Athletes like Brian Olson, a judo player from Tallahassee, got his start in the Sunshine State Games in his youth and competed in four Olympic Games. Nancy Hogshead was a high school swimmer in Jacksonville, who competed in the first Sunshine State Games in 1980 and won three gold medals and a silver in the 1984 Olympic Games

Of the 25 teams, at the SSG/Miami Police Athletic League (PAL) Track and Field Meet, from Boward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach County, athletes as young as four years old were able to compete in the 100 meter dash and long jump. What more do kids that age want to do than run and jump?

Coaching an athlete at that age is a tough job, but a rewarding one, according to Miami PAL Track and Field Coach, Michael Cotton.

“You’ve got fresh, raw talent you can mold into talented athletes and great young people,” Cotton said. “The challenge at that age is you have to create a workout to fit each child.”

Cotton likes to turn their workouts into a game. Like a game of tag.

“For the runners, if they’re ahead, the strategy is to not let them catch you,” he said. “If you’re behind them, you have to catch them.”

Athletes come to the Miami PAL program through a grandfather program from siblings who have been in the track and field program or other sports, football and cheerleading.

Cotton points to Jamari Howard, who started at an early age in the program and is now a senior at Miami Northwest, as one of the Miami PAL success stories. Howard also plays football and has made official recruiting visits to Alabama, Georgia, FSU and Texas A&M.

One of Cotton's youngest athletes competing this weekend is Autumn Chavers, in the 5-6 year old age groups, in the 100 meter dash, 800 meter run and long jump. The long jump was her most successful of the three events, coming in fifth place with a leap of 1.67 meters (5 feet, 5 inches), a personal best.

"Our team is doing great this weekend," Cotton said. "A lot of kids are reaching personal bests."

Twin sisters, Brooke and Olivia Ketchum, now eight-years old, from the Skating Club of



Florida, practicing at Palm Beach Ice Works, have been skating since they were five years old.

"We used to live in Las Vegas and there was a facility like this one (Florida Panthers IceDen) where the Golden Knights practiced near our house," said their dad, Hank Ketchum. "They took an interest and we've been doing it ever since."

Their mother, Angela, learned to skate as a self-taught ice skater, who learned in an outdoor rink, growing up in Jefferson City, Missouri.

"I used to watch my brother and learned how to skate on my own," said Angela, who never skated competitively, like her daughters.

Brooke and Olivia competed in the Basic 6 program with Brooke winning a silver medal and Olivia placing fifth. Both said they had a good time competing in the Games and Brooke enjoys learning to jump while Olivia likes learning the different spins.

The Basic program starts at level one and Brooke and Olivia have moved up to a program that includes one revolution jumps and spins. Their coach, Rosie Larson, hopes to see them move into the Pre-preliminary Free Skate events in the near future.

"Both of them are doing great and progressing quickly," said Larson, whose 16-year old daughter Annabelle also competed this weekend at the Games. "They're putting a lot of time into their skating."

The Sunshine Summer Kickoff Lacrosse Tournament had teams just breaking into the game, with three teams in the 8 and under division. The PV Jaws team, from Ponte Vedra, won their two pool play games for the gold medals. The PV Jaws 10 and under team also won a gold medal in the 10 and under division.

Bo Lamon, the director of the Sunshine Summer Kickoff Tournament, who has coached Lacrosse at all ages knows the good and the bad of coaching young athletes.

“You’re teaching fundamentals at the age,” he said. “You’re working on picking up ground balls, catching and throwing and where to be on the field. At this tournament, they playing on travel teams, so they get it. They’re some of the better athletes for that age.”

In the 12-team Boys High School A Division, the Florida Select Carolina team was undefeated in six games, defeating the Miami Black team 6-2, in the championship game.

Broward and Palm Beach Counties host 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, Events

CORAL SPRINGS - Track and Field athletes, starting at four-years old through high school seniors, representing 25 clubs in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach County arrived early Saturday morning at the Ansin Sports Complex in Miramar for the Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon.

Sporting the bright team colors of the Miami Northwest Express, Hallandale Beach Thoroughbreds, Lauderdale Cheetahs, Miami Gardens PAL Elite, Fort Lauderdale Track Club and Twin Cities Track Club, to name a few, the athletes came to run, jump and throw heavy discs.

The morning started with the 3000-meter run, shifted to hurdles races and finally, the 100- and 200-meter dashes. On one end of the track, boys and girls approached the bar at the long jump. While on the other end, they sprinted down the runway to long jump into a pit of sand.

It’s all part of a youth initiative presented by the City of Miami Police Athletic League (PAL), directed by Officer Malcolm Moyse, to instill work ethic and discipline in South Florida’s youth.

While athletes took to the starting line for their 100 meter hurdles race, they were focused on the track and the sets of hurdles awaiting them. They stared intently down the runway leading up the white line as their measure to leap into the air. They quietly thought about the mechanics needed to make the longest discus throw possible.

“When you see them intense like that, it means they’re concentrating,” Moyses said.

Events like this are a starting point for South Florida athletes. The Police Athletic League hosts two track and field meets a year, Moyses forsee the Sunshine State Games meet at the Ansin Sports Complex growing in the future.



Collegiate teams in Florida and nationwide, as well as NFL and other professional sports rosters, are full of South Florida athletes.

“This area is a number one spot for that,” Moyses said. “If you remember these names out here today, you’ll see them on college and pro sports rosters in the future.”

In the marquee race, the 100-meter dash, the top overall time was run by Bradley DiManche, of the Hollywood Track Club, crossing the finish line at 11.05. He topped Frezier Fresain, of the Miami Northwest Express, who ran a 11.23.

The biggest surprise of the day came in the Women’s 100-meter dash, as Skyler Franklin, a 15-year old, had the top time with a dash of 11.79. An unattached runner who attends Somerset Academy Central in Miramar, Franklin’s time bested the 17-18 year old division’s gold medalist, Carly Stermer, of the PAL of Hallandale Beach, who ran a 12.14.

On the other end of the age groups, Kyi Smith, of the Fort Lauderdale Track Club, won the 4 and Under Division with a 100-meter dash of 17.48. Savana Lowe, of the Miami Northwest Express, won the 4 and under Female Division with a time of 22.14.

Saturday’s Figure Skating competition at Florida Panthers IceDen added choreography and a flair for the dramatic with Showcase Events, Couples Dance, Character Performance and Comedic Impressions Events.

In the Showcase events, a theatrical opportunity for skaters, performances were both solo and in pairs, using props and elaborate costumes. Athletes were vying for a chance to advance to the National Showcase, to be held at the AdventHealth Center, in Wesley Chapel, August 2-6.



Amelia Menendez-Horvath, of Champions Edge Skating Club in Wesley Chapel, skated a routine wearing a T-Rex costume. She bought the costume for a Halloween Party a few years ago and decided to give it a try in a skating routine.

“It was very hard skating in the costume,” she said. “I’ve been practicing every morning for a month for today. I didn’t fall and I had a few jumps in the routine.”

Other costumed skaters include Joshua Nunez, of the Space Coast IcePlex FSC, in an astronaut costume, skating to Elton John’s Rocket Man. A pair skaters took the ice in powder wigs, skating to “Rock Me Amadeus,” and a skater dressed as Wednesday Adams, skated to the Adams Family theme.

Haley McKee, of the Space Coast Iceplex FSC, had not skated in the Sunshine State Games for eight years. She performed a Showcase Choreographic Artistry routine, based on the Natalie Portman movie, Black Swan.

In the movie, the Black Swan signifies bad days, while the White Swan signifies good days.

“You have to have both,” McKee said. “My music, a song called, Perfection, had high points and low points. The lower music shows the White Swan as delicate and the high points shows the Black Swan as fierce.”

McKee, now 22, last skated in the Sunshine State Games when she was 14. During her time away from the Games, she has been busy with her education, starting college classes at 15 and received her bachelor’s degree from the University of North Florida, in 2020. She is finishing a Master’s Degree in Clinical Psychology, online from Pepperdine University this year and will seek a doctorate degree next.

“I’m looking at New York City,” she said.

She has been working on the routine for the last month in preparation for today's event.

"I ran a 5K every day (3.1 miles) to train and skated two or three days a week for an hour," McKee said.

The Betty Stark and Dorothy Dodson Awards were presented today to a Juvenile Girls and Intermediate Ladies skater for their performances.

Veronica Carhart, of the Florida Everblades FSC, earned the Betty Stark Award for having the highest score in the Juvenile Girls Free Skate. Nicole Skripnikov, also from the Florida Everblades FSC, was the Dorothy Dodson Award Winner for the most combined points in the Intermediate Ladies Free Skate and Short Program.

Figure Skating events begin on Sunday at 8:30 a.m. and conclude at 3:00 p.m. [CLICK HERE](#) for Results.

At the Village Park Athletic Complex, over 120 teams played on 16 fields at the Sunshine Summer Kickoff Lacrosse Tournament.

In the Boy's High School A Division, the WLTW team, made up of players from Jupiter High School, is undefeated in three games of pool play. WLTW outscored its opponents 22-0 in the three wins and is one of three teams undefeated in the 12-team division. WLTW begins bracket play on Sunday.

The FLX Lacrosse team, South Florida's longest-running travel Lacrosse team, in action since 2007, has a pair of undefeated teams heading into bracket play. The Boy's High School B Division team is undefeated in three games and has outscored its opponents 29-5. The Boys U14 B Division team is 3-0, outscoring its opponents 31-3.

In the Girls High School A/B Division, three Florida Select teams have combined for a 9-0 record. The Florida Select 2025 and 2026 teams, along with the Navy team have posted three wins without a defeated.

2022 Sunshine State Games Begins First of Six Weekends of Events with Three Sports

CORAL SPRINGS - Haley Scott may be small in size, but she's an extra large when it comes to character and confidence.

After a year off the ice due to the Covid-19 virus and its complications, she returned to the ice after seven months of training for the 2022 Sunshine State Games. presented by Amazon, Figure Skating Championships.

Haley Scott (*pictured below*), from Wesley Chapel, is not just any skater among the more than 400 at the Florida Panthers IceDen in Coral Springs, this weekend. She is the 2016 Betty Stark Award Winner and the 2017 Dorothy Dodson Award Winner. The awards are presented to the Juvenile Girls and Intermediate Ladies High Scorers in the Short Program and Free Skate Events.



In the five years both awarded have been presented, Scott is the only skater to win both awards. She is one of 11 Sunshine State Games Figure Skaters to win the Dorothy Dodson Award since 2009 and she has been skating in the Sunshine State Games since 2013, as a seven-year old.

She skated in the Senior Women's Short Program Friday afternoon and the 16-year old won the gold medal. Her score of 48.93 was the highest among all skaters in the Short Program and one of only three above 40.0.

Her performance on Friday was a testament to her determination and love of skating, according to her Champions Edge Skating Club coach of the last four years, Sylvia Fontana. The Covid-19 Virus and its complications affected her heart, brain and nervous system, from November 2020 through November 2021.

"I was sick for a year and couldn't walk for a while," Scott said. "I'm still trying to get back to where I used to be."

For the Short Program, Scott skated with ease and confidence. She had a fall early in the routine during one of jumps but continued to finish her program strong. Scott admitted to being "really cold," after waiting her turn to skate, which may have been a factor in the fall.

"She's also used to skating in an Olympic-size rink and this is a hockey rink," Fontana said. "It's smaller than what she normally skates."

Now recovered from a year of not skating, Scott is back practicing six days a week for four to five hours a day. She is completing her high school credits through Florida Virtual School and has begun taking college-level classes at Pasco-Hernando State College.

“She has a lot of natural talent and I believe in her 100 percent,” Fontana said.

Scott will continue with her skating and continue building her confidence as she works her way through a two-year college degree before many of those at her age graduate from high school.

“I plan on attending a four-year school for a degree,” she said. “But I’m going to wait and see where figure skating takes me before I make a decision on where I go.”

At this rate, Haley Scott can pick and choose wherever she wants to go.

2022 Sunshine State Games Begins First of Six Weekends of Events with Three Sports

TALLAHASSEE - This weekend begins the first multiple sports weekend of Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, through the end of June.

Beginning Friday, Figure Skating will be held in Coral Springs, Lacrosse will be played in Wellington and Miramar’s Ansin Sports Complex will host a Track and Field Meet.

Over 1,200 individual athletes will combine to compete in Figure Skating and Track and Field and 122 Lacrosse teams will be in action.

For the first time since 2019, the Sunshine State Games Figure Skating Championships will have skaters on the ice at the Florida Panthers IceDen, in Coral Springs. The 406 registered skaters represents the most in the 34-year history of the event.

The first of 757 starts will hit the ice at 9:00 a.m. Friday and continues through 3:00 p.m. on Sunday. Skaters of all ages will spend a total of 28 hours doing spins, jumps and various other routines.

“We have a lot of skaters,” said Betty Stark, the Sunshine State Games Figure Skating Sport Director, from Coral Springs. “Since there hasn’t been a Sunshine State Games in three years, there’s a lot of new skaters and some who have been in the Games before.

The Sunshine State Games is partnering with the Miami Police Athletic League (PAL), to present the Atlantic Coast Club Championship, at the Ansin Sports Complex, in Miramar.

The event is expected to draw 800 athletes, from age 4 through seniors in High School. The majority of athletes are from Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach County, according to the Malcolm Moyle, the City of Miami Police Department PAL Athletic Coordinator.

“This is our first event at the Ansin Sports Complex and we want to make a good impression at a world class facility,” Moyle said. “We usually have our meets at high schools and we want the athletes to go home and tell folks about this meet so more will come back next year.”

Moyle said the original anticipated participation level was higher, but a state middle school track and field championships has athletes traveling to that event.

Events begin at the Ansin Sports Complex on Friday evening at 6:00 p.m., Saturday morning at 8:00 a.m. and Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m.

Finally, the Sunshine Summer Kickoff Lacrosse Tournament will be played at the Village Park Athletics Complex, in Wellington. Among the 122 teams playing from the 8 and under division through high school divisions are 78 boys teams and 44 girls teams.

Games begin at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday and continue through Sunday afternoon.

2022 Sunshine State Games Offers More Sports, More Opportunities - Register Now

TALLAHASSEE - With a current roster of 25 sports, the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon, offers the most opportunities for amateur athletes since the 2019 Games, when over 7,000 athletes competed in 26 sports.

Registration is now open for a majority of the sports of the 2022 Sunshine State Games, presented by Amazon. The 2022 calendar features 25 sports, with multi-sport Festivals held in four Florida communities and 22 facilities statewide hosting the events.

For competition and registration information, please visit www.sunshinestategames.com. Athletes can check the individual sports pages at the Sunshine State Games website, or find the “Register Now,” button on the top right corner of the page.

Now in its 43rd year of providing amateur sports opportunities to Florida athletes of all ages,

the Sunshine State Games has been used as a stepping-stone to national and international competitions by many Florida athletes.

Since 1980, here's a handful of Florida-born athletes who have achieved greater levels of success after getting their start in the Sunshine State Games.

Anquan Boldin, Basketball, Pahokee: a member of the gold medal winning 16-and-under City of Pahokee Team and Age Group MVP in the 1996 Sunshine State Games. After a collegiate career at Florida State, Boldin was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals, had over 1,000 career receptions and played with the 2013 Super Bowl Champion Baltimore Ravens.

Jearl Miles-Clark, Gainesville, Track & Field: was a member of the gold-medal winning Junior Women's 4 X 100 meter relay team in the 1982 Sunshine State Games. Earned a spot on Team USA and competed in the 1988, 1992, 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games. She won 4 X 400 Relay gold medals in the 1996 and 2000 Olympics.



Justin Gatlin, Pensacola, Track & Field (left in photo with Roy Jones, Jr at the 2018 Florida Sports Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony): was a Gold Medalist in the Intermediate Boys 110 meter hurdles with a time of 14.42 in the 1998 Sunshine State Games. He won a gold medal in the men's 100 meters at the 2004 Olympic Games and a bronze medal in the London 2012 Games.

Nicole Haislett, St. Petersburg, Swimming: appeared in several Sunshine State Games competitions in the early 1980s and was a standout at the University of Florida, where she was named Southeastern Conference Female Athlete of the Year in 1993 and 1994. Haislett won gold medals in the 200m freestyle, 400m freestyle relay and 400 medley relay at the 1992 Olympics.

Ashleigh Johnson, Water Polo, Redlands: is the 2016 and 2020 gold medal winning-Team USA Water Polo starting goalie. Was a gold medalist with the Miami Riptides in the Open Women, U18, U16 and U14 division teams from 2003-2013.

Roy Jones, Jr. , Pensacola, Boxing: a gold medal winner in the 1980 and 1982 Sunshine State Games and won a silver medal winner in the 1988 Olympic Games. He was the undisputed Light Heavyweight World Champion and considered one of the most successful boxers of the 1990s.



Ryan Lochte, Swimming, Daytona Beach (*pictured left at 2012 SSG Alachua County Festival*): Won a total of seven Sunshine State Games medals competing in the 1999 and 2001 Games and made his Olympic debut in Athens in 2004 and competed in the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Games. He is a 12-time Olympic medalist, making him the second-most decorated swimmer in history, behind Michael Phelps.

Brian Olson, Judo, Woodville; Participated in Sunshine State Games Judo from age 6 in 1981 and competed regularly until 1989. Olson earned a spot on the 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 U.S. Olympic Judo Team. His best Olympic finish came in 2000 when he placed seventh in Sydney and is one of the most recognized names in the judo world as an athlete and coach.

Jennifer Rodriguez, Artistic Roller Skating, Miami: Before making four trips to the Winter Olympics in Speed Skating, Rodriguez honed her skills in the Artistic Roller Skating Championships, from 1983-1987 and 1990-1992. She competed in the 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010 Winter Olympic Games winning bronze medals in the 1000 and 1500 meters in 2002.

David Ross, Baseball, Tallahassee: A member of a gold medal-winning baseball team and an honorary torch lighter at the 1993 Games in Tallahassee. After a college baseball career at Auburn University and the University of Florida, Ross had a 14-year MLB career, and won World Series Championships with the Boston Red Sox and Chicago Cubs. He is currently in his third season as the Manager of the Cubs.

Antonio Tarver, Boxing, Orlando: A silver medalist in the 1982 Sunshine State Games, Tarver won a bronze medal at the 1996 Olympic Games. He became the World Light Heavyweight Champion winning it from fellow SSG alum, Roy Jones, Jr. in May, 2004 and retaining the title in September, 2005. He played the nemesis of Rocky Balboa in the Rocky VI movie.

2022 Sunshine State Games/AAU Volleyball Championships Begins Annual Calendar of Amateur Sports Events



TALLAHASSEE - The Sunshine State Games/AAU Grand Prix Volleyball Tournament offers up the first serve of the 2022 Sunshine State Games Calendar of Events when 67 teams take the court at the Game Point Events Center, in Orlando.

Girl's club team volleyball players from the 11-year old age group to the 18-year old age groups will be in action beginning on Saturday, February 26, with pool play, and

games continue in bracket play, on Sunday, February 27.

The 14 through 16 age groups have the most teams competing with the 14 year-old age group sending 13 teams on the court, the 16-year old age group with 12 teams and the 15-year old age group with 10 teams.

The No Limits SportsPlex, from Lakeland, will be well represented with 11 teams scattered throughout the 12-year old age group, to the 18-year old age group. The No Limits group will have two teams playing in each of the 14-year old through 17-year old age groups.

“We’re looking forward to a lot of good competition and reps for our players,” said Steve Ousley, founder of the No Limits SportPlex, who will be coaching teams in the 12-year old and 17-year old age groups. “We play in seven or eight different tournaments between January and May. Since January we’ve played in tournaments in Tampa and Orlando and the Nike 100 in Daytona Beach.”

Ousley said approximately 122 players will represent the No Limits Sportsplex this weekend in Orlando, Volleyball is the largest club sports program at the SportsPlex, that also offers programs in Soccer and Flag Football, as well as upcoming spring break and summer camps.