

LAUNA Tournament

The annual LAUNA (Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America) basketball competition for men 35 years and older was held in Elizabeth, New Jersey this spring. On April 5th, six teams from the US and Canada came together to the Garden State's historically most Lithuanian city in their quest for a special trophy brought by the organization's Northeastern chair Mr. Žilvinas Bublīs from Kaunas a few days before the games, which took place in the newly renovated Dr. Albert Einstein's High School gym.



The championship winners "Liepsna-1" from New Jersey shown with the referees from the Chicago Lithuanian Basketball League

Surprisingly Chicago, where the largest number of Lithuanians resides outside of Lithuania and where a Lithuanian Basketball League has existed for 5 years did not compete. However the Windy City did get some representation - three referees flew into Newark, NJ the night before the tournament to serve as the officials of all LAUNA Senior basketball tourney games. As was expected, the local team New Jersey "Liepsna-1" ("The Flame") defeated their competitors to claim the gold medals and the Cup was presented to the team's captain Marijus Kuzavas, who also received a monetary prize from one of the officials, Mr. Žydrūnas Širvinskas from Chicago.

The MVP prize presented by the organizers went to another player from the New Jersey Lithuanian American Community sports club - the "Liepsna-2" leader

Darius Babkauskas. Second and third places were taken by New York's "LAK-2" and "LAK-1" squads respectively, the latter of which narrowly defeated Hamilton "Kovas" in the bronze medal game. The tournament was well organized - thanks to the LAC Elizabeth, NJ chapter treasurer Mr. Rimantas Bitėnas for his great role. Because of his efforts the City of Elizabeth Board of Education granted LAUNA the right to use the Dr. Einstein's High School gym. LAUNA is most grateful to them.



The final moments in the championship game for the gold medal when New Jersey "Liepsna-1" defeated New York's "LAK-2"

Saturday night was danced away by the tournament participants and guests as they gathered in the Lithuanian Sts. Peter and Paul Church parish hall to rock according to various styles of music, professionally prepared by DJ's Rimas and Arvydas from Connecticut. We are looking forward to the future basketball events, the first of which will be going on around Washington D.C. organized by the Lithuanian Embassy in U.S. on April 26, 2008.



The referees from that Lithuanian Basketball League of Chicago: (from left) Žydrūnas Širvinskas, Evaldas Monstavičius and Giedrius Jovaiša.

Laurynas (Larry) R. Misevičius, Chair - LAUNA Board

Photos by Algis Navikauskas Brookfield, CT