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## King of his domain

### Sheffield teacher is four-square champion

Sports

Monday, February 12

The rivalry was born out of the Project Exploration summer camp program on the campus of Yale University in New Haven, Conn. But it was destined to end in Bridgeton, Maine, in the biggest competition that either man had ever entered.

One was known for a serene, almost sensai-like approach. He was Jasper "The Quiet Storm" Turner, a Sheffield resident and a teacher at The Berkshire School.

The other was a flagrant self-promoter, a combination of the worst qualities of boxing promoter Don King and football player Terrell Owens. He was Christian "Tigerclaw" Housh, a native of Cambridge.

The game was four-square — the rubber ball-bouncing recess game that many people

discovered as a kid. The date was Feb. 2. The location was the Bridgeton Town Hall auditorium. The prize was a world championship.



Four Square "world champion" Jasper Turner poses for a portrait on one of the squash courts at The Berkshire School in Sheffield. Photos by Darren Vanden Berge / Berkshire Eagle Staff

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Jasper Turner shows the form that recently made him the four-square world champion. Turner teaches at the Berkshire School.

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him," Turner, 26, said about his primary rival in the eight-man final. "I don't think the other players appreciated his antics. We have differing approaches. He's kind of loud and obnoxious. I'm quiet and take people by surprise."

They arrived together on a Winnebago named "The Bus of Rock," which held 11 men, many of whom

had their eye on the elusive world championship. Six competitors from The Bus of Rock competed in the third annual fundraiser thanks to Housh, who suggested this year's destination to his companions.

The group had come together for a bachelor party and a whitewater rafting trip just over two years ago. This year's outing likely would be the cheapest — just a \$10 entry fee — and whatever it cost to go ice fishing to kill time the day before.

But while they arrived in the same vehicle, the two could not have been more different.

Housh wore a cape and sported knee pads with a growling tiger sewn on. He wore garish socks and eye black and wrestling shoes. He leapt into his square like Superman and flashed his fingers like a cat's claw. He distributed trading cards with his career highlights to the crowd.

Turner watched silently, picking off opponents one by one, like a trained four-square assassin.

"There are two different strategies in this game," Housh said. "One is to be quiet and survive. The other is to make yourself a target. That's how Tigerclaw plays. Tigerclaw isn't just a character, it's a state of mind. That's how I roll."

"I was surprised by how well (they co-existed)," said Rob Mathews, a Bus of Rock member and a championship onlooker.

Turner's victory — gained in the thirty-minute, eight-man final round by one point over Housh — and his physical sacrifice made him something of a hero among his peers.

Turner left the court that day with swollen hands. Housh was further wounded, with a giant laceration covering his hip, the result of a frantic dive to keep the ball bouncing.

"When you got down to it, this was quite an athletic event," said Mathews, a passenger of the Bus of Rock and an on-looker to the world championship. "The finals were more intense than I ever imagined."

"To me it's like a really good volleyball game," event organizer Peter Lowell said. "The players were hurling themselves across the floor with really good accuracy."

Turner hadn't played four square in three years since his days as a counselor at Project

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Turner hasn't played four-square in three years since his days as a counselor at Project Exploration. Housh, the director of communications for the group, plays each summer and has joined SquareFour, a Boston-based four-square club.

Both became acquainted with the game during recess in elementary school, and the world championship seemed to transport them back to their youth.

"The thing that really sticks out about it is that you're acting like kids," Turner said. "We're grown men arguing about whether a ball hit the line."

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Since returning to Berkshire County, Turner has handed the trophy over to the athletic director at the Berkshire School in a ceremony in front of the entire student body.

He's planning to attend a Sheffield town meeting and request a plaque in his honor. And his fellow competitors, so impressed by his performance, have gotten his name written into the annals of four-square history on the prestigious pages of Wikipedia.

"It was very emotional," Turner said. "I was close to tears. Very close."

When Lowell heard of their intention to enter the tournament, he grew concerned.

Surprisingly, he didn't fear for the safety of the competitors or that his trophy "hideous green with gold plating," by his account, would be hauled off by an outsider. He didn't even worry that these two ferocious competitors would frighten off the rest of the field, which would have left the event — The Lakes Environmental Association, a group dedicated to preserving lakes in western Maine, short of its projected monetary mark.

No, Lowell was worried that the Bus of Rock would turn his family-friendly event into a frat boy haven, which wouldn't help the group earn any national recognition.

"Two years ago we had a state senator call our office because he wanted to make a letter of recognition and we all started laughing," Lowell said. "We all started laughing. I don't think he ever sent that letter."

Perhaps Lowell underestimated the seriousness of the group.

Housh's trading card included stats — 280 serves and five clobber points on the season — and several photos and graphics.

•

As the field of 45 competitors was whittled away through a couple of hours of ferocious action, it became clear that these two were destined to meet. In the final round, which included eight players, Turner emerged the winner.

He entered the tournament on a whim, ignoring the fanatical training that competitors from Boston's SquareFour League and the University of Connecticut's four-square club underwent before the championship.

But despite the long odds, Turner prevailed, winning over his opponents in the process.

"I had a terrible start," Housh said. "I went on a mad streak at the end, but he won by a point. At an event like this, if you're going to lose, you want to lose to the best."

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