

## Jay Gary Jackson (1949-1987)

Reported by Jessica J. Sparks ("That Gal" of "Those Guys Mercenary Service")

The game has lost a good friend and strong supporter. Jay Gary Jackson, age 38, passed away of a heart attack December 13, 1987 in Ventura County, California. We will miss him.

Jay played his first game on a cold fall day in 1986, brought to the sport by his friend Todd Goodman. At first, Jay "didn't think I'd like paintball after being in Vietnam . . ." But when he took out an opponent in the second game of the day, Jay had to admit "I was hooked . . ." By the next weekend he had bought a paintgun and all the accessories.

In the following months, despite serious health problems, Jay never missed an opportunity to play. Paintball became a major motivation in his life. To improve his playing abilities, Jay lost weight, quit smoking and started following his doctor's recommendations. To improve the quality of play for his fellow paintballers, Jay spent hundreds of dollars stocking a complete first-aid kit with which he would treat any minor on-field injuries free of charge. That's the kind of paintballer Jay was, he took everything about the game more seriously than most of us.

Not even a moderate heart attack (his fourth) in December of '86 could keep Jay away from the sport; when the doctors told him he had to stop playing until he recovered his strength, Jay went out and bought a van, loaded it with all the necessary equipment, and opened up the now legendary "Mobile Mess" as a way to remain active and involved in the game he had come to love so much. (At the old Tactics field in Simi Valley, California, Jay's hot breakfasts and lunches became an institution. The high point of the Mobile Mess' early days featured a steak, lobster and salad dinner for dozens of players as part of an all-night game!)

In the spring of '87 the doctors at last gave Jay the green light to start playing again, and he went at it with a renewed zeal. As a defensive strategist for his team, "Havoc," Jay specialized in setting traps and ambushes for



**In the fall of '87, just a few months before his death, Jay's friends at the Conquest field in Malibu, Ca. mounted a sign on the wall where Jackson would usually end up positioning himself during games (top). A few of "Those Guys..." posing for a picture; Jay with his converted Sheridan rifle is in the front.**

unwary, too aggressive squads. Then "that crusty old hamburger flipper" met and became friends with Dave Bert, Bill Matthews, Peter Miller, J.Y. Yandell and Jerry Yandell, Sr., and together they formed the paintball club "Those Guys Mercenary Ser-

vice." Playing with "Those Guys," Jay's game reached a new level. He became known as a hard-charging hammer and a heck of a good shot with "Bertha," his converted rifle.

Jay willingly assumed the roles of first-aid tech, airsmith, source

of CO<sub>2</sub> refills, water and shade, and organizer for the team. He made it his responsibility to make sure "Those Guys" lacked for nothing at the field. And each Friday night, Jay "The Buzzard" Jackson was the person to call to see where the action would be for the weekend. He set up road trips and weekday dinners, making the club more like an extended family than just a bunch of players.

What most didn't see were Jay's efforts to make paintball a source of pleasure and fulfillment for everyone involved. He spent hours at South Bay Arms learning to repair guns, then stocked a full tool and parts kit in his truck so no player would have to stay sidelined for long with a gun problem. And any player running low on funds could count on Jay for a free air recharge or enough rounds for the day — he'd just say, "Take what you need and replace it when you can."

Equally unnoticed (he never made a big deal about getting recognition) were Jay's efforts to make this sport better in the public's eye. He worked with the county government, trying to convince officials that paintball — like tennis, hiking and horseback riding — ought to have space on public lands. And when one local newspaper reporter wrote an unfavorable article about the game, Jay hit the roof, then the phone, and stimulated another feature article by the same writer telling the "other" side of the story. Wherever he went — in stores, theatres and restaurants — he'd talk about the game to employees and other customers. And even though he complained about rookies who, he said, "always make the most unpredictable moves and never seem to be where they're supposed to be," Jay recruited every chance he got because he knew the sport must grow to survive. (Perhaps his greatest recruitment for the sport was his wife, Barbara.)

Very few know the role Jay played in the development of paintballs. He and I spent many months testing experimental balls for a manufacturer so that company could produce a better round (that improved paintball, in fact, would have been called the JAY-1). When nothing came of his efforts, despite disappoint-

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ment over the exploitation of his work, Jay walked away from the project and went back to being, in his words, "just a player."

Jay "The Buzzard" Jackson lived with an awareness of his illness. He knew and faced up to the fact that death comes suddenly and unexpectedly to all of us, and he would talk about what was really important in life with his close friends and family. "This game," he so often said, "keeps me alive."

In the memory of Jay, his family and friends ask that you do the kinds of things he did: Make it your responsibility to improve the safety of the sport, including having team members and field personnel trained in CPR and first-aid; encourage the growth of paintball by helping rather than exploiting rookies, and bring a friend to play; and above all, give more to the sport and your fellow paintballers than you take.

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