

## HOPE Volleyball BeachFest conditions were less than ideal, but that didn't stop 10,000 players from having a good time for a great cause. Adam Grachnik reports.

There were no sexy bikinis, and few musclebound hunks on the beach yesterday. Instead, thousands covered up, ignoring the rain, blistering winds and frigid air to play in the HOPE Volleyball BeachFest at Mooney's Bay.

Most of the 10,000 players huddled in tight groups, in a sea of tents or under large trees trying to stay dry between their games. Even though conditions were ideal for an afternoon on the couch with a few sappy movies, all 80 courts were in constant use.

Organizers say there were 15,000 people in attendance, down from 20,000 the year before. Overall financial numbers were down, too.

Karen Wood, HOPE marketing manager, said preliminary figures show more than \$600,000 was raised for eight area charities, down from the \$775,000 raised last year and \$700,000 the year before.

"It's still a great chunk of change and it's still going to charity," said Ms. Wood, explaining that yesterday's walk-up crowd, charged \$20 at the gate, was very small.

"We're down in attendance, down in beer sales and down in sponsorship."

But the players didn't abandon the organization that has raised \$4.5 million for more than 100 area charities in 21 years.

This year's recipient charities include the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Alzheimer Society, Children's Wish Foundation, Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the Ottawa Hospital Foundation, Nelson House of Ottawa-Carleton, Canadian Red Cross and St. Mary's Home.

"The rain just dampens the ground," said Howard Esbin, HOPE's executive director. "The beautiful thing about HOPE is we create our own sunshine."

Mr. Esbin said the event was fantastic and explained that he was already excited about next year's tournament, which will grow to include events in Halifax and Guelph.

Yesterday, players tried creative ways to stay warm and



Temple Moone from Perth, left, shows fine form during yesterday's competition; Bill Powell, centre, takes part in the wheelchair portion, new at this year's HOPE Volleyball BeachFest. At right, Quinlan Willbond, 20 months, has a warm and dry vantage point in his stroller.

dry. One group was standing in front of a large generator, which was feeding power to speakers pumping out tunes to the beach.

"People will remember the year of the 21st HOPE tournament — they'll talk about it," said Patrick McCann, sporting a thick grey sweatshirt and rubbing his hands together.

"It's a great event and an awesome cause," he said, as a large blue tarp, once protecting the speakers five metres up, blew off and fell on his head.

As the wind picked up and the rain made the walkway muddy and slippery, many people squatted under the trailers of supply trucks.

"We're psychotic and willing to endure anything," said Elodie Button, her arms covered in a red long sleeve shirt, while being embraced tightly by her boyfriend. "But every time we get on the court, we're hot and crazy excited."

Some players described the wet sand as very hard and sticky. "It's not that bad, there's a lot of grip," said Kim Moir, with a laugh, standing on the sidelines.

Organizers for HOPE (Helping Other People Everywhere) said they were prepared for the rain and would only cancel the

event in the case of lightning, which they almost had to do four years ago, when a storm hit at the end of the day.

Live entertainment from Daisy Ella Mojo Crew, Holly McNarland, Jim Cuddy and Colin James played near the beer garden.

As Mr. Cuddy, Blue Rodeo's frontman, played in the early afternoon, there was a little relief from the rain, but it didn't last long.

Naomi Stegenga was huddled in a brown cotton hooded sweatshirt, her knees blue and her lips even darker. She was clutching a green and white umbrella as she spoke from under a tree, with her teeth chattering.

"I've committed to a team and I want to play," said the former Trent University volleyball player, explaining her ice water was still frozen. "Nothing will make me leave."

Montreal's Gary Lawrence said he has been coming for 10 years.

"I'd be here rain or shine," he said, grinning widely, caught between games sipping a beer. "Why leave? We're in the beer garden, under a tree. It's great."

One promotional truck was giving out free slushy samples.

"I'm surprised that people

are still coming," said Ashleigh Jurgielewicz from Toronto, as lineups of wet people formed in front of her truck.

"Ottawa people are troupers," she said. "Everyone is really friendly, I can't believe it, everyone's awesome."

For the record, she had heat in her truck and a roof over her head.

Likewise, Julie Abbey was feverishly mixing strawberry daiquiris and pina colodas for people who were lined up for her drinks.

"It's a summer drink, people are pretending that it's summer," she said.

This year marked the first year that wheelchair volleyball was included in the tournament. Four teams of 10 people, played on a wet tennis court, 30 metres from the beach.

"This is a great stage for HOPE, I'm surprised nobody thought or suggested it before," said Wendy Ireland, sitting out her turn in the rotation of a game.

"A lot of people with disabilities thought HOPE was an event in the sand," said Dean Mellway, who played with the Canadian National Sledge Hockey team in the Lillehammer and Nagano Olympics. "It's nice to have this," he said.