

Badminton helps fill social void for international students

by Linda D. Powell

Frank and Nellie Baker have enjoyed the game of badminton since their young adult years in England. For 24 years they have made use of their interest in the sport to provide a way for international students at Duke to meet and have fun.

The International Badminton Group was formed by the Bakers during the 1962-63 academic school year. It began as a club for international students but has grown to include some alumni, faculty and employees.

Frank Baker, a retired emeriti faculty member from the Divinity School, came to Duke in 1960. He and his wife enjoyed playing badminton in their hometown of Yorkshire, England, and wanted to start a club for students at Duke.

"When Dr. Baker was an active British Methodist minister, we were affiliated with lots of churches," said Nellie Baker. "Wherever we went we tried to get a badminton club started. So when we came to Duke, we wanted to do the same thing.

"The first nine months at Duke, we lived on East Campus near what was then called the Women's Gym. We

would play in the gym two evenings a week with some Indian students. We had such a good time that we asked the physical education department if we could start a club."

Badminton is a game similar to tennis that is played with racquets and shuttles across a high net. It originated in England and is named after the town of Badminton.

The club meets in the East Campus Gym on Friday evenings from 7 to 10, Nellie Baker said. The games are open to anyone with a Duke ID. Players can bring their own racquets, but equipment is provided by the gym.

Nellie Baker said about 38 people show up to play every Friday night. There are usually about 100 people who sign up to play each semester, she said.

The majority of the students in the group are Chinese, but students from Paris, Sweden, Japan, Belgium, the Persian Gulf countries, Taiwan and Korea also participate, she said.

The Bakers help the students with every aspect of the game. Nellie Baker supervises the registration of players and arranges them in groups of four



J. O. Hunter

Nellie Baker chats with international students who participate in the weekly badminton games that Baker and her husband started sponsoring 24 years ago.

for playing, and Frank Baker coaches beginning students.

Frank Baker encourages the students to improve their game.

"Sometimes the students become discouraged, but I try to coax them to do better," Frank Baker said. "I (See Bakers, page 3)

Bakers sponsor badminton games for international students

(Continued from page 1)

once coached three disabled students who were in different groups. Two had tunnel vision and one had a leg brace, but they all ended up playing very well."

The group is a special part of the Bakers' lives, but it also is important to the students.

"The club means a lot to us," said Frank Baker, "and most of the students say they will never forget about the group. The club is a real value to the students and gets them involved with exercise. Nellie and I have always

enjoyed sports and think sports are important for a well-rounded life."

Nellie Baker said the group is like a big family, and she feels like their mother. "The students talk to us and share parts of their lives with us and each other. Sometimes the students bring their spouses and children to the games. They also bring letters from home to share with us.

"The club gets these students involved with other students and faculty members," she said. "A lot of them are lonely because their family members are home in their native

country. This is an outlet for them, a place where they can socialize."

Wei Guo, a Chinese graduate student in the Department of Physics, said he enjoys the badminton group.

"I have a lot of fun at the games," Guo said. "You get an opportunity to meet lots of friends from different countries. The Bakers are very nice to sponsor this program for us."

Samia Rashid, a graduate student in the School of Engineering, thinks playing badminton is a good way of releasing tension. She has been a member of the group for 1½ years

and usually comes every Friday night.

"What Dr. and Mrs. Baker are doing is great," she said. "Not many Americans play badminton, it's more of an Asian sport."

Frank Baker said he and his wife want to continue participating in the group as long as they can. "Working with these students is like being involved with a ministry," Frank Baker said. "It's wonderful, pastoral work, seeing such happy relations between people of different nations."