

AHS 1999 captures its first ABL Championship

By: EJ Solis



AHS1999 celebrates its first Championship as a batch. This comes at a time exactly 20 years after graduation.

9 March 2019, Blue Eagle Gym, Q.C.—Facing the much younger and athletic Team Limchutick, High School Batch '99 came out with a 67-56 win to grab its first ABL crown in the Baby Dalupan Division. Paolo Bugia filled up the stat sheet with 16pts, 11rebs, 6asts and 3blks. Bugia, along with Bajjie Del Rosario, were named in the Mythical 5, while Del Rosario was awarded the season MVP.

Building the foundation

Like any other winning team, this one was not built in a day. It took 4 years to assemble the right pieces. The core group was still composed of E-boys led by Del Rosario, Bogey Bernardo, Andrew Araneta, Dr. Angelo Cabalona, Shred Santiago, PJ Aldea, Pope Gumabao, Atty. Pochoy Labog, Tbram Cuyugan, Atty. Jelo Puno, Ian Maambong, Reinier Panga, Raffy Yambao, and EJ Solis, who were the 2015 Champions. The E-boys were anticipating being assigned to a much tougher Open Division following the 1999 Special Batch Division being dissolved. Other teammates had plans of moving abroad, so the team knew it would be difficult to win with only a few players. Thus, began the recruitment for batchmates. However, there were still missing pieces. After the unsuccessful 2016 and 2017 campaigns, it was indeed time to further intensify attempts of getting other batchmates involved. By the 2018 season, the team expanded to include ABL stalwarts Joey Puno, Clint Erestain, Yong Gregorio, Ivan Javier, Richard Isidro, Jason Canda, Redg Plopinio, JP Sarmenta, Jomar Go, “guest players” Nino de Leon and Arnel Osma ¹, and prized recruits PBA veteran Paolo

¹ Nino de Leon and Arnel Osma are based abroad but were able to play a few games when they are on vacation in country.

Bugia, and the original Phenom, BJ Manalo. This became a batch team—**AHS 1999**. It was a heartbreaking season as AHS 1999 lost by 1 in the semifinals versus eventual champions Team Po. This sparked the determination to further improve for the 2019 season. The team added Chickoy Antonio, Marco Campos, Marti Gallego, and Paolo Cagalingan to its roster.

2019 Season

It was a shaky start as the team split its first 2 games—beating AGSB 82-76 in the season opener but getting burned by Team Bayot after Rainier Sison and Louie Sinco combined for 19 treys of the team's 21; 80-87.

The third game proved to be one of the most memorable as AHS 1999 faced the undermanned (7 players only) Team Barracoso. The latter dominated the game from the get-go with their hot shooting from the outside. Down by 12 with 5 mins in the 4th, Erestain, Bernardo, and Del Rosario attacked the basket to cut the lead. This caused Barracoso to be in foul trouble, losing 3 players in the process with 4 players remaining. Then Del Rosario took over. Scoring a 4-point play, another trey, and with 4 seconds to go, Bernardo passed to Del Rosario for a corner trey at the buzzer to force the game into overtime. In the extra period, despite being a man down, Team Barracoso kept the game close. Stifling defense allowed 1999 to get ahead with Del Rosario hitting another 3 to seal the win 94-87. It was a TMac-like performance by Del Rosario for the books, scoring 10 points in 1 minute.

That win was a start of a 3-game winning streak, exacting revenge with Team Bayot 84-73; and dominance by Giannis-like game of Bugia vs Team Limchutick 88-54. Team Barracoso snapped the streak, 66-72. The eliminations ended with a morale-boosting win despite having only 7 players behind Gregorio, Bernardo, Cagalingan, Javier, Campos, Go, and Solis overpowering Team Songco, 73-58. The team became the top seed with a 5-2 record.

Semi-finals: Nail-biter

A rivalry had been brewing as, for the third time, 1999 came against Team Bayot. This was a classic game in the making as the game was filled with scoring runs led by Bugia (25p,11r, 4a, steal, block), Gregorio (18p, 9r), Del Rosario, and Erestain with 14 pts apiece, that set-up a down-the-wire finish. 1999 was down by 1 and Chickoy Antonio had an open shot but quickly passed to Erestain for an under-goal stab for the go-ahead basket. Joey Puno sealed the game with a clutch free throw as 1999 won 74-72 to advance to the finals.



Finals bound!

The Finals

The match-up was a surprise as Team Limchutick pulled off an upset vs. Team Barracoso to advance in the finals. It was unfortunate as Limchutick was undermanned with only 5 players. Call it luck, but as the Roman philosopher Seneca once said, *“luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity”*. Now, this was the chance, after 4 years of waiting. Limchutick battled their way behind their prolific outside shooting. 1999 led most of the way but Limchutick cut the lead to 5 mid-way in the 3rd. Defense tightened up and 1999 regained its form to build a double-digit margin. The bench mob was able to deliver once again behind Jomar Go’s highlight plays with a Karl Malone-esque lay-up and a “manual” step-back. In the end, the usual suspects led the way, Bugia (16p, 11r, 6a, 3blks), Gregorio (13p, 7r) and Del Rosario (13p, 3 treys). Finally, AHS 1999 wins its first ABL crown 67-56. Bugia and Del Rosario were named in the Mythical Team and Del Rosario claimed another MVP award.

This championship is indeed special as it is the first championship won as a batch and comes exactly on our 20th anniversary after having graduated from High School.

Complete Win-Loss Record including Semifinals and Finals:

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	%
AHS 99	7	2	0.778
Team Barracoso	4	4	0.500
Team Limchutick	4	5	0.444
AGSB	3	4	0.429
Team Songco	3	4	0.429
Team Bayot	3	5	0.375

2019 Team roster

PJ Aldea, Chickoy Antonio, Andrew Araneta, Bogey Bernardo, Paolo Bugia, Angelo Cabalona, Paolo Cagalingan, Marco Campos, Jason Canda, Bajjie Del Rosario, Clint Erestain, Marti Gallego, Yong Gregorio, Jomar Go, Pope Gumabao, Richard Isidro, Ivan Javier, BJ Manalo, Redg Plopinio, Joey Puno, JP Sarmenta, Shred Santiago, and EJ Solis.

2018 roster

