

French team victorious at bicycle polo tourney

By **BEN BAUGH**

Staff writer

Vive La France! France, in a defensive-minded match, held off Aiken Green 6-4 to capture the International Bicycle Polo Tournament finals that was hosted this weekend at Wintthrop Field by the Bicycle Polo Club of Aiken and Augusta.

The tournament was played in Aiken in celebration of Aiken Green's Billy Matheson, one of the world's most renowned bicycle polo players.

The tournament featured six entries, including contingents from France, Canada and an international team comprised of players from all over the globe, and three teams from the United States, including two from Aiken and one from Unionville, Penn.

The finals pitted the two teams that had gone undefeated in the tournament, with each having won four games to reach the deciding contest.

France (French National Selection) struck first in the first period, receiving a goal as the result of a penalty infraction, and would make it 2-0 in the second period before Aiken Green would answer back on a goal from Zak Smith.

France would increase the margin to three goals in the third period, before Steve Smith scored to close the gap to 4-2, but France would add another tally before the start of the final frame.

Aiken Green scored twice in the fourth period, as Steve Smith and Billy Matheson tallied for the home team, but the French team would put the game out of reach with a goal midway through the session and played strong defense to thwart a late drive from Aiken Green.

"This was a big win for us, especially coming over from France to play in the



Staff photo by Ginny Southworth

Steve Smith with the Aiken Green team stays close to the ball as a French National team member drives it downfield.

tournament," said Jean-Pierre Malandain, French National Selection. "It's our first tournament victory outside of the country."

A French club did win a tournament earlier this year in Scotland. The French team was composed of six of the best players from France.

"It was great that so many teams came to play in the tournament and came from

great distances," said Matheson. "I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of great people through the sport, and I'm honored by their presence here in Aiken. Some of the best teams came here to

play. Canada who has won two gold medals in the world championships, and France captured two silver medals. We were outplayed and outshot. The French team played brilliantly together."

The loss was bittersweet for Aiken Green, and a rematch looms as a strong possibility.

"It happens," said Zak Smith, Aiken Green. "We'll get them next time, and hopefully, our next match against them will be in France. They adapted very well to the different style of play in the United States, and we're pleased with the way we played."