



Game, Set, News

USTA Community Tennis Association Quarterly Newsletter

Summer 2013 Edition

A Tennis Project for Brooklyn:

Children in Public Housing Get Coaching and Gear; 'One of the Nicest Places for Kids in Bed-Stuy'

By Frederick Dreier

On most summer Saturdays, Nia Cardoze practices her forehand at the tennis courts outside Brooklyn's Marcy Houses, alongside 30 or so kids from the sprawling public housing complex. Tennis practice, Cardoze says, will bring her one step closer to her idols, Venus and Serena Williams. "I want to become the No. 1 player in the world," said Cardoze, 10. "People can watch me on TV."



Bedford-Stuyvesant's Nia Cardoze, 10 years old.

Cardoze is a member of the Kings County Tennis League, a nonprofit that provides coaching and tennis equipment to children living in public housing projects in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. Every Saturday, about 100 kids from the Marcy, Sumner, Lafayette Gardens and Tompkins Houses gather on small tennis courts or playgrounds alongside volunteer instructors.

First, The kids do calisthenics and practice basic tennis techniques. Then they pair off to play matches or run traditional skills games. Several times each summer, the four teams—named for the housing project they represent—face off in Davis Cup-style tournaments. The league is backed by a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Tennis Association, which for decades has attempted to push tennis beyond its country-club image. According to Kurt Kamperman, the USTA's chief executive of community tennis, 70% of all tennis in the U.S. is played in public courts, like the ones in Bed-Stuy. The USTA spends about \$10 million annually to foster the sport's growth in low-income areas. "Stereotypes die hard—if we're going to stay relevant, we need to show that tennis is accessible to everyone," Kamperman said. "We want a diverse audience."



The lion's share of the USTA funding pours into upkeep of tennis courts and the construction of facilities. Other cash flows into school programs, such as the National

Junior Tennis and Learning Network, which provides cheap or free tennis instruction at schools. The Kings County program is different. Instead of operating out of schools, the program bases itself in the public housing projects where its participants live. Volunteers bring the tennis rackets and nets directly into the recreation areas at the housing projects, and network through the community's social web to attract new participants and volunteers.



"This isn't a program for kids who have a hard time finding courts or rackets," said Michael McCasland, the league's founder. "This is about starting tennis in places where there was absolutely no tennis."

A tennis standout in high school, McCasland moved to Bed-Stuy from Washington, D.C., in 2008 and noticed the gritty Marcy tennis courts, which were rarely used for tennis, he said. One Saturday, McCasland arrived at the courts with a bucket of tennis balls and an extra racket, and began offering free tennis lessons to the neighbors.

"Nobody showed interest," McCasland said. "It was weird to have these tennis courts and the people didn't want to play tennis."

McCasland was undeterred. He posted fliers at bodegas and walked the neighborhood offering to teach kids for free. He said he wanted to show his neighbors that tennis wasn't just a "white guy" game. After a month he had five students. By the summer's end he had 20.

McCasland developed a retention program for the next summer. Children who came to three practices could rent a racket for the week, free of charge. Five practices earned the kid a uniform. He also began mentoring his students, helping them learn vocabulary and develop life skills outside of tennis.

For three summers, McCasland ran his program on a shoestring, collecting used rackets from friends and holding informal fundraisers at bars. In 2011 he received an email from an official with the USTA's Eastern Section, which oversees tennis development in greater New York City.

The relationship with USTA led to the grant money, which has allowed McCasland to purchase rackets, print uniforms and expand into the other public housing complexes. McCasland says his model could be rolled out into public



housing complexes across the country. "This can work anywhere there is public housing," he said. "There is a structure within housing projects that you can tap into."

The USTA, however, is taking a conservative approach. While it seeds small projects like McCasland's on a semi regular basis, it rarely expands them into nationwide movements. In New York, for example, the USTA also funds the South Brooklyn Tennis Association, the New York State Recreational and Park Society and Albany's 15-Love program, which all focus on youth and tennis.

Kamperman said the secret sauce that creates success in local tennis camps is usually impossible to replicate on a bigger scale.

"A lot of people come to us and say I made it happen in this city, I can make it happen in 50 cities," Kamperman said.

"But the truth is that if you take that Johnny Appleseed out of the equation, the key ingredient is missing." But changes in attitudes toward public housing could pave the way for the Kings County league to



spread. Kamperman said he recently met with officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to discuss tennis as a recreational activity for public housing works, where childhood obesity rates are abnormally high.

In urban neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant, where crime rates have fallen in the last 20 years, recreation is now a regular piece of people's lives. Omar Cardoze, Nia's father, said the tennis league would have never taken off in the 1990s, when drug use and gang crime plagued the Marcy Houses.

"This is one of the nicest places for kids in Bed-Stuy now," said Cardoze, 36, a lifelong resident of the Marcy Houses.

"My daughter doesn't have to run. My daughter doesn't have to duck. She can just play outside."



[Click here to find out more information about Kings County Tennis League.](#)

Wayne D. McCoy Beach Blast was a blast!

The Wayne D. McCoy Beach Blast was held at the Owl Creek Tennis Center in Virginia Beach under sunny skies and with great anticipation shared by everyone attending. Pairs of players with intellectual disabilities volunteered to play in a doubles round robin. The event is open to all athletes with intellectual disabilities in Virginia. This year featured 38 athletes and over 70 volunteers with participants not only from the Tidewater area, but from as far away as Arlington.

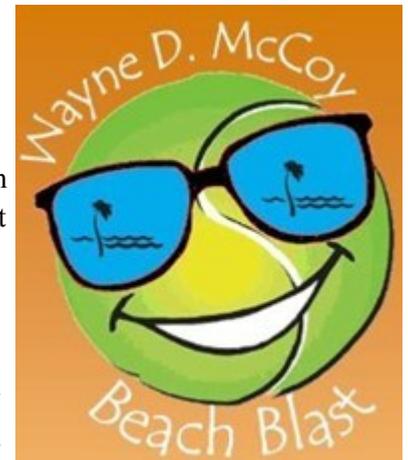
In addition to full court match play, short court tennis and skills were also part of the activities. The short court matches utilized the Special Olympics 42' court format with red felt tennis balls, where athletes could demonstrate their proficiency with basic tennis strokes. During their time in between matches, the athletes played a variety of USTA/Virginia Tennis carnival games and most came away with great prizes. Following match play, everyone enjoyed a fantastic luncheon sponsored by the Virginia Beach Tennis Patrons Association.

A new addition to this year's Beach Blast was an Adopt-a-Unit packing party for the latest unit adopted by USTA/Virginia Tennis - **Detachment 19, Alpha Company, 48th Combat Support Hospital**, a medical unit out of Fort Story in Virginia Beach. Beach Blast athletes filled tennis cans with all types of goodies which will be distributed amongst the troops.

All players and volunteers received a Wayne D. McCoy Beach Blast t-shirt provided by Area 2 Special Olympics and the players also received an additional gift bag with goodies provided by USTA/Virginia Tennis, The Virginia Beach Tennis Patrons and Jackie Vu.

USTA/Virginia tennis would like thank the event sponsors; The Virginia Beach Tennis Patrons, Virginia Tennis Foundation, Virginia Beach Parks and Recreation, and Special Olympics of Virginia. **A special thank you to all of our volunteers!** This event could not have happened without their assistance. USTA/Virginia would also like to recognize the invaluable contributions of our tournament committee – Cindy Allen, Ginny McCoy, Wayne McCoy, Debra Trent and Jackie Vu.

[Click here to find out more information about Adaptive Tennis.](#)



Beach Blast athletes participated in an Adopt-a-Unit packing party.



The Wayne D. McCoy Beach Blast featured 38 athletes and over 70 volunteers.

Retired Life Serves Up Fulfilling Mission for Tennis Enthusiast

By Jack Frink



Lainey Rathgeber has hobnobbed with Pulitzer Prize winners, hung out with presidents and worked all over the country with New York Times best-selling authors. As a book publisher representative for various companies, including industry titan Random House, Rathgeber lived in a world of books for more than two decades.

It was a life she loved, but Rathgeber, who turns 55 today, grew weary of the constant travel required of book representatives. So, at a relatively early age, she retired in December 2012. However, she soon found a new source of income in another long-time love. Today, instead of packing books in her car trunk, Rathgeber packs rackets and tennis balls. She has swapped traveling cross-country to call on bookstore accounts for heading to area schools to hang with kindergartners.

“Teaching tennis combines two of my loves: tennis and kids,” Rathgeber says. “The kids are so enthusiastic.”

Rathgeber is a director/sports instructor for TGA (Think. Grow. Achieve) Premier Youth Tennis. She teaches tennis to children five days a week through the “Ten And Under Tennis” program created by the Los Angeles-based, education-focused TGA. The students, who are between the ages of 4 and 10, meet Rathgeber after school and to get help with everything from holding a racket to playing doubles.

Rathgeber arrives at the schools near the closing bell and sets up the court, equipment and teams. For the youngsters, the balls are low-compression and the rackets are smaller than regulation. Rathgeber makes quick analyses of her students’ abilities to match up children who play at similar skill levels and keep everyone involved.

“The kids come out of school and they are just full of energy,” Rathgeber says. “They want to hit that ball! We start them out with smaller equipment, because they’re smaller people. As their skills grow, we’ll graduate them to the full-size rackets.”

Tennis may be her passion, but it wasn’t the major professional focus of Rathgeber’s life until recently. A book lover (she lists her favorite authors as Richard Russo, David Sedaris and Molly Ivins, among many others), Rathgeber began working in the written word as a graduate student in St. Petersburg, Fla. Working for three years at the local book store Bayboro Books, Rathgeber learned how important publishing representatives are to the book industry. She developed connections that eventually informed her of a job opening with Random House.



“I sent my resume into Random House, flew up to New York for the interview and came back with a job,” Rathgeber remembers. “I became the rep for Florida, Mississippi and Alabama.”

It was the beginning of a career that saw time with a number of different publishing houses. “I did that for 23 years and sold tons of books across the whole country,” Rathgeber says.

Among the most exciting moments of those 23 years include meeting heads of state like President Jimmy Carter and Gen. Colin Powell at events for their respective authorial efforts. She also took Richard Russo to a little league baseball game at the beginning of the celebrated author’s career.

Rathgeber, a native Texan who spent much of her early life in Houston, relocated to Austin in 2000. She spent the final 12 years of her career in publishing there. It was last year when road weariness fully set in and Rathgeber decided to draw this chapter of her working life to a close.

“I don’t want to say I saw the writing on the wall, because my region is still very active,” Rathgeber said. “But with the advent of online resellers and eReaders, book stores started closing. Also, I wanted to travel less. I was ready to get off the road.”

At the beginning of retirement, Rathgeber knew she still needed to bring income into her household. Health insurance is an expense until she can qualify for Medicare, and there are always incidental home costs. She had begun playing tennis in 2006, and by 2012 the sport had become a major part of her life. She loved that the sport “doesn’t feel like exercise.”

“I wanted to do something, but I really don’t like working out,” Rathgeber says. “I’m not an exercise fanatic.”

With tennis, Rathgeber was able to re-establish the camaraderie she missed from her life in publishing. She founded a tennis team – Get A Grip – and plays on several United States Tennis Association (USTA) local league teams as well as participating in area tournaments.



So when Rathgeber learned through her tennis e-mail group that TGA was setting up a program for children in Austin, she quickly applied and was hired almost immediately. The 10 And Under Tennis program is endorsed by the USTA. It had great appeal to Rathgeber because of the child obesity problem in the U.S.

“This is at least one hour a day when the kids can get their energy out and stay healthy,” she says.

Rathgeber’s love of professional tennis also had something to do with her decision. “Serena (Williams) is No. 1 in the world, but after her there’s a huge drop off in terms of U.S. players in the top 10 in the rankings,” she says. “We need to get these young kids playing tennis, so we can have more Americans as premiere players in the game.”

Rathgeber loves spending time with her energized students, even if they are a few years away from being mature enough for Gen. Powell’s *My American Journey*. America’s sports culture might currently undervalue tennis, but Rathgeber is surprised and inspired by her pupils’ enjoyment of the court.

“The best part is their enthusiasm and energy,” she says. “What draws me into something is when people have an enthusiasm for it. For some of these kids, this is the first sport they’ve ever tried. Meanwhile, some of the older kids come in with basic skills. The challenge is keeping everyone active at a level they are comfortable with.”

Rathgeber explains that it’s very rewarding to see how much her students take to the game she loves. “If even a few of them take up tennis and continue playing, that would make me very happy,” she says.

“So many people are unhappily employed,” Rathgeber says. “I had a passion for book selling, and now I have it for tennis. I’m lucky that I’ve found something later in life that I enjoy so much.”

[Click here to find out more information about 10 and Under Tennis.](#)



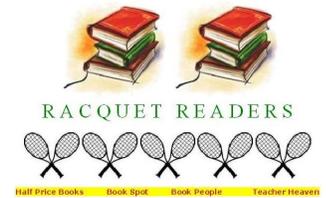
Racquet Readers



Racquet Readers (RR) is a Literacy group that was started to benefit the Central Texas Tennis Association (CTTA). CTTA provides free to low cost tennis lessons, tutoring and mentoring to children in South and East Austin, Texas. The inspiration for CTTA came from Sujaan Lal, a volunteer tennis coach and mentor to children who attended CTTA's NJTL summer tennis camps. CTTA was previously offering a reading program, but nothing like what the Racquet Readers have been able to offer in the past year. Sujaan had a chance to see the life changing and life saving skills employed by Ms. Sarah Pernel on



and off the court. Sujaan wanted to help these children in a meaningful way and bring books/reading skills to their doorstep, just as CTTA brings tennis lessons and life skills.



RR started its work in December 2011, collecting books from all Austin book stores, neighborhood and school book drives, garage sales, school district libraries, friends and family. By December 2012, RR had collected and given away over 9,000 books to CTTA/NJTL children and to 17 Austin Area public schools. Earlier this year, our books reached McLane Children's Hospital and Head Start Programs in outlying Austin counties through Texans in Motion. Over 15,000 books have been collected to date.

Sujaan and Ms. Sarah are joined in this effort by Smrithi Mahadevan, Rohan Makhija, Aarti Bhat and Sanjit Kumar, who are all tennis players at Westwood High School. More recently, the group devoted their efforts to recreational centers in Austin to promote literacy by reading to children and giving away books to call their very own. They have enlisted the help of Westwood High School Varsity Tennis and National Honor Society members as well as the University of Texas at Austin students. RR will be starting the Westwood Literacy Club that plans to partner with more local schools to set up reading and mentoring networks with other high school tennis teams called "Tennis Reads."



Recently, Ms. Sarah received a call from a young lady in Dallas, Rachel Drazner, who is also a tennis player and interested in starting a similar program in Dallas. This is the beginning of what CTTA hopes to accomplish with this exciting program. Eventually, they hope to have a Racket Reader program in every city, and this is the beginning.

Carol Welder, a CATA board member and USTA volunteer, an avid player, and an outstanding leader for the tennis community, recently joined this endeavor. With her assistance, the CTTA partnered with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department to help bring books to every Recreational Center in Austin. Ms. Sara Hensley, Austin Parks and

Rec Director, has been very instrumental in this project and has provided free bookshelves at the various centers. Currently, RR are up and running at Metz and Garcia Rec. Centers. "Our goal is to have every library in every rec center up and running by the beginning of the school term." Due to the number of books we currently have, we are seeking storage space and or donations to assist in renting space for our books until they can be permanently placed in our children's homes and libraries.

We welcome the tennis community to join us in our efforts to help those who are less fortunate and to promote the joy of reading to our children. So we are calling out to all tennis fans and book lovers: "We are the Racquet Readers taking books to every nook! To read is to grow and set the world aglow! Join us in this effort and you too will grow!"

[Click here to find out more information about the CTTA's Racquet Readers.](#)

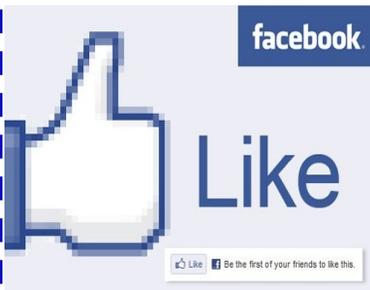


Central Texas Tennis Association

Register Your Adaptive Tennis Program

The USTA has developed a database of Adaptive Tennis Programs with the purpose of connecting tennis players with the programs available to meet their tennis needs. [Register your Adaptive Tennis program](#) and stay informed about grants, events, awards, and more. It is free to register your program.

The charge of USTA Adaptive Tennis is to promote and develop recreational tennis opportunities for individuals with varying abilities and circumstances through inclusion, knowledge, and support. The USTA continues to support programming for individuals with physical, developmental, and situational challenges. Visit the [Adaptive Tennis](#) page of the USTA website for more information.



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Be up to date with community tennis news!

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The next edition of *Game, Set, News* will be released in October. Thank you for your continued commitment to growing and developing tennis!

Questions? Email us at cta@usta.com