

NetPLAY

Winter 2010-2011
Volume V • Issue 3



NEW BEGINNINGS



NEW PROGRAMS



NEW STARS

2011 PREVIEW

If You Build It, They Will Come



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Four moms and one dad. Those were the first batch of recruits for Set Point Tennis Organization when Mike Murphy wanted to start a USTA Jr. Team Tennis (JTT) program in Berks County, Pa.

Murphy saw kids learning tennis, but did not necessarily see them playing tennis. He knew that a tennis league would be a great way to give back to the community and provide a healthy, safe opportunity to keep kids active. He thought what better way is there to start spreading the word than engaging the parents of tennis players?

The bottom line is that kids want to play on teams with their friends and have fun. Murphy was certainly onto something with his vision of team tennis play and soon came to find out that JTT was the perfect fit.

Who hasn't driven by a community park, school or local fields on a Saturday to see them flooded with kids playing soccer, baseball or football and most importantly they are also flooded with parents!

Murphy knew to get the most out of his league he needed to not only incorporate parents into the process, but also make it into a picnic atmosphere. He went to local businesses to solicit team sponsors. Soon he had pizza, hoagies and drinks for each match and banners promoting local businesses hanging on the courts. There was a rest area for players between matches as well as soon to be famous "tennis ball" sugar cookies baked by Murphy's fiancée for every match and player.

"The kids are as happy and proud to wear their team jerseys as they are to be a part of the league," said Lynn Aldredge, a local teacher whose daughter participates in the league. "Mike does a great job with the organization. Not only is it fun, it is always so well run and organized."

Murphy's league soon became a well-oiled machine and along the way inspired another mother, Heather Gelting, to run a similar program. Gelting, who recently became the President and Chairman of the Board for the Greater Pottstown Tennis Association (GPTA) saw an opportunity to bring a similar sense of community to her neighborhood.

She collaborated with Murphy with the intention of bringing this similar community-feel already enjoyed by little league baseball and youth soccer to Pottstown. Just like Murphy, Gelting realized that parents were the key ingredients to fuel the program.

She began with a flyer promoting a local practice for kids interested in playing on one of GPTA's Jr. Team Tennis teams. When Heather and her husband went to the courts with tennis balls and waited for the kids to come that first day, she soon realized that her expectations were about to be exceeded.

Like the popular line in the movie *Field of Dreams*, "If you build it, they will come," Gelting provided an opportunity and people seized it.

"Cars just kept showing up," said Gelting. "It was tremendous. We actually ran out of registration forms."

between sets



Central Pa Brothers Take Their Tennis Game to Spain

Andrew, (17) and Alec, (16) Grossman of Mechanicsburg, Pa., certainly can cross improving their conversational Spanish off their summer-to-do list after the two returned from Spain. Participants in the Tennis: Europe program, the Grossmans joined 14 other American teens for a trip to Spain for tennis training, tournament play and some sightseeing. The Cumberland Valley High School standouts had the unique opportunity to match up against international competition on the famed red clay courts while receiving expert instruction from some of the globe's best tennis professionals. Andrew and Alec were awarded matching grants from Tennis: Europe and a great deal of support from the local tennis community to make the trip a reality. •

GPTA ended up fielding three teams in that first season and thanks to Gelting, initiated a "team mom" program where snacks and beverages were provided by parents each week. Another way Gelting brought the experience closer to more traditional youth team sports was having a "team photo day," where players and parents alike were able to leave with a team photo just like other sports.

These are just two examples of how parents played a large role in growing JTT. There are hundreds of moms and dads participating and coaching teams in USTA Middle States and we thank them for their time and dedication. •

—Kasey Connors