

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TENNIS ASSOCIATION NEWS

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LA84 Foundation/NJTL Facts

Mark Winters

Fact...

If the Southern California Tennis Association had a credo, it would be one that vows to provide “learn the game” opportunities. That being the case, it isn’t surprising that Vic Braden, a long-standing SCTA Board member who is recognized as an innovative instructor, used to meet with a group of community tennis activists each Friday at LAX to work on developing a youth instruction program. Jim Hillman, the retired SCTA Director of Junior Tennis recalled, “Sy Allen Browning was in charge, and people like Paul Arroyo and Pete Torres played a part. In time, Jack Kramer and Leonard Straus helped with financial support. Ed Bell, who was with Arco, eventually became involved and provided funding. Later, with the help of Pete Brown, Fred Nobles and Hollis Smith, I started Future Champions. After the Watts Riots in 1965, with all that was changing in the city, we were able to get some workers and opened programs at four sites.”

The outreach effort brought tennis instruction to disadvantaged areas throughout Los Angeles and eventually became the National Junior Tennis & Learning Program (NJTL).

Fact...

After winning the US Open in 1968, Arthur Ashe, his fellow UCLA teammate Charlie Pasarell and Sheridan Snyder devel-



Patrick Escobar
Photos Cynthia Lum

oped the NJTL concept with the end goal of making tennis lessons available to youngsters across the country for a minimal fee.

Tennis Association to fund NJTL. The partnership has continued through 2012.

“The 27th year of LA84 Foundation/NJTL in Southern California has been a great success,” said Patrick Escobar, LA84 Foundation Vice President, Grants and Programs. “More than 8,500 youngsters had the opportunity to learn to play tennis. They also made good friends and had fun at the Special Activity Days that were held. But more than that, they learned the importance of dedication, discipline and practice necessary to improve their game. They learned to listen to the coach, respect the opponent and adhere to the rules of the game. These are lessons that will stay with them for their lifetime.”

Amy Gibbons, the first to oversee NJTL



Special Activity Day

Fact...

The Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, now known as the LA84 Foundation, was established to oversee the disbursement of funds, resulting from the record-breaking Los Angeles Olympic Games success. In 1985, the organization began a relationship with the Southern California

locally, recalled, “The introductory tennis program was one of the first funding recipients after the Olympics. Because of the continued support, tennis has been introduced to thousands of youngsters at public parks in underprivileged areas. Several of them have gone on to achieve great things. Serena and Venus Williams, who started playing in the program, are just two examples. NJTL would simply not exist without the LA84 Foundation.”



Serena and Venus Williams began playing tennis in the LA84 Foundation/NJTL Program.



Arlene Barco became, in truth, the Godmother of NJTL and was its caring leader until a stroke in August 2008 ended her twenty plus year involvement. "We are especially grateful to Arlene, who for many years, was the lead person for the SCTA," Escobar noted. "Her love for the sport and her desire to bring tennis to youngsters, who may not otherwise have been introduced to the game, was instrumental in the success of the program."

Melanie Bischoff, the head of Community Tennis, added Director of NJTL to her responsibilities after Barco's departure. A former LA84 Foundation Grants Associate, Bischoff said, "There is nothing that meant more to Arlene than NJTL, and all that it involved. She worked hard to make it the best it could be. She absolutely loved it, and would do anything she could for the kids and the instructors."

Bischoff continued, "The program is going strong. The summer effort began with the NJTL Instructor Orientation in June. Stella Sampras-Webster, UCLA Women's coach and Rance Brown, UCLA Associate



added. Assistance from AETNA and USTA Serves enabled Life Skills Curriculum to be offered at Victoria Park in Carson."

As Bischoff pointed out, there was even more to NJTL's year, "Tim Bryant, Jr. won the 11 & Under division of the USTA's annual Arthur Ashe Essay contest, which asks youngsters to outline their thoughts about fair play and good citizenship derived from the NJTL program. Bryant, Jr. and his parents were flown to New York for Arthur Ashe Kids Day at the US Open.

"Program participants attended the Farmers Classic, presented by Mercedes-Benz,

are the soul of any successful endeavor. For this reason, Bischoff saluted those who play such an essential role. "At the SCTA's Annual Meeting, on February 6th, all the NJTL instructors present were recognized for their ongoing service and dedication," she said. "Those on hand included Tim Bryant, Park Cockerill, Al Erby, Dee Henry, Sam and Montez Noa, Alice Sims, John Thomas, Barbara Tscherne and Fred Williams. Thanks were extended to all of the tennis instructors that help to ensure that the NJTL program continues and that youth in low-income areas have the opportunity to learn the great game of tennis."

Escobar also praised the instructors. "The success of this year's program, as in past years, is due to the great group of coaches at the different sites that come back year after year," he said. "Their dedication is inspiring. Many of these coaches have seen the youngsters they once taught become assistant coaches, move into adulthood and bring their own children back to the program."

He concluded, "Partnerships happen because of people who share a common goal. Throughout the years, the SCTA leadership has been unwavering in its commitment to the National Junior Tennis Program. Through their words and actions they have stayed true to bringing tennis to those who have traditionally been underserved. We are proud to be supportive of those efforts.

"The yearly commitment of Program Director Melanie Bischoff, and the leadership of the Southern California Tennis Association, to ensure the success of the program, is to be commended."

Fact...

LA84 Foundation/National Junior Tennis & Learning Program (NJTL) has written the "How to do it" primer, when it comes to growing the game.



Parris Todd and NJTLers

Women's coach, were the keynote speakers. Craig Jones, USTA Director of Youth, Play and Competition, joined the festivities and conducted the on-court segment of the meeting. Lisa Leslie-Lockwood, a former WNBA star, stopped by and talked about the importance of 10 and Under Tennis, and the responsibilities of being a coach and mentoring young athletes."

During the summer, 150 sites offered NJTL programs. Even more impressive, 35 locations have it on a Year-Round basis. "This year, NJTL was also sponsored by the Westcoast Sports Associates (WSA)," Bischoff said. "Thanks to the company's support, two new Year-Round sites were

the men's professional tournament at UCLA. LA84 Foundation's Patrick Escobar, Vice President of Grants and Programs, was introduced as a prelude to the NJTL 'Between Match Activity' demonstration. Special Activity Days, at Whittier Narrows Park drew 200 kids, who had a great day of fun tennis and an opportunity to earn some great prizes. There was also one held at Robb Field in San Diego."

Parris Todd, one of the top junior competitors in the section and the country, for that matter, has helped with Special Activity Days, during breaks from tournaments, for the past two years. "I do it because I have the chance to give back because I'm so blessed," she said. "I know how many unfortunate people there are out there, and I like to do as much as I can to help."

For Todd, being involved is rewarding. "Seeing the smiles on all the kids faces makes it memorable," she said. Another highlight was "when a group of like seven funny kids kept coming back over and lining up for my autograph."

Everyone who has participated in tennis realizes that those involved in organizing

