



Center Court

NOVEMBER 2023

A Giver, Player and Great Community Asset – M.A. Hillier

Mary Alice Hillier, otherwise known as M.A., has lived a full life by combining her extensive tennis background, educational degree in Recreation Administration and altruistic nature to make things happen. A look back at her consistent efforts shows a marked path of great accomplishments not only at the Balboa Tennis Club, but also in the San Diego Tennis Community.

Exercise has always been a priority in M.A.'s life. She began playing tennis at age 13 despite her parents wanting her to play golf. Her Mom played tennis and her Dad played golf, yet tennis found her heart. "I just loved to run around and chase the ball," she said. M.A. received a national ranking after competing on a junior circuit for four years. She chose SDSU to play collegiate tennis after turning down a full ride to Arizona State.

M.A. graduated from SDSU in 1977 with a degree in Recreation Administration. She worked as an intern with the City of San Diego at the end of her education. After three weeks, the City hired M.A. full time and she continued along this path as a Therapeutic Recreation Specialist from 1976-2002.

In 2001, she met Marla Knox who started the San Diego Adaptive Sports Foundation (SDASF). This organization was offering wheelchair basketball

and other sports camps. M.A. asked herself, "how about a tennis camp?" She checked with BTC Tennis Director Geoff Griffin to see if the possibility of creating a Wounded Warrior Tennis Camp in San Diego could be feasible and he gave the green light to get a committee formed. M.A. assumed the role of Camp Coordinator from 2012-2019, treating wound-

ed, ill and injured warriors from all over the country to an all-expenses paid week of tennis and fun in San Diego. She also served on the US Open Wheelchair Tennis Championships committee from 2000-2007 and is still involved in many USTA National Committees including Leagues, Adult and Senior competition, and currently the Wheelchair Tennis Committee. M.A.'s dedication to the disabled population and USTA National Tennis competition has been exemplary.

M.A. joined Balboa Tennis Club in 2010 to find better tennis competition. She volunteered to be league captain for over 10 years and also participated on several league teams herself. "I always enjoyed the camaraderie, organization and scheduling involved with being a league captain," she said. The injury bug hit her many times during these years, having to endure 12 knee surgeries and a left hip replacement. "The hip surgery was so painful that I never thought I'd be able to play again," she said. Nonetheless, the bionic woman found the courage and strength to step on the court after a year and a half away from the game and hasn't looked back.



M.A Hillier and Maddie

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**Message from the President of Balboa Tennis Club
Dr. Gary L. Smith**



Of great significance are the reminiscences of life that each of us experience. It has been of the utmost importance for the Board to maintain as a priority, that each BTC member has an endless list of positive memories. We continue to strive for a warm, healthy, caring and truly collaborative environment. Often times, the Board is faced with contentious, personal and sensitive issues. By promptly addressing these matters, we consistently work together toward problem solving and gathering appropriate input. As a team, we choose a course of action which hopefully results in good decisions.

Having a strong 1600+ membership and a constant stream of hundreds of people on the waiting list, does not happen by accident. In the last decade, we've had some incredible members of the Board (like Janene Christopher-President, Ruben Carriedo, etc.), serving multiple terms, to propel BTC to where it is now. Current Treasurer Michelle Ford (4 years) and M.A. Hillier (8 years) are retiring from the Board, and I cannot overemphasize their contributions and ability to "think outside the box." They demonstrated common sense, a very high level of discernment and the innate ability to make the right decisions even in the face of controversy. Concomitantly, the nucleus of VP-Andrew MacFarlane, Secretary Todd Linke, Maegan Demko, and Mario Suarez compliment a unit striving for positive momentum and future successes.

With Colleen's commitment to property improvements, we have been fortunate to observe many capital enhancements and continual upgrades to the Club. Tennis court resurfacing, an improved court camera observation system, power washing of the stadium walls and a new roof for the Clubhouse account for the majority of facility enhancements the past year. Of course the maintenance challenges such as restroom plumbing need to be mentioned as there seems to be no end to the problems of maintaining an aging building.

Route 6 Cafe has demonstrated sustainability and a true commitment to provide excellent food, drinks and service to Club members and the general public. Hiromi Sasano/HJKventures had the task of replacing legendary Geoff Griffin/Griffin Tennis and they have performed admirably. The newly renovated Pro Shop, featuring same day service for stringing and a variety of merchandise, along with the continuation of successful instruction and even more clinic choices, has propelled the teaching experience at BTC to a new level. In the Reservation Desk area and with all personnel, the Board continues to focus attention on good people skills, interpersonal relationships, and other positive characteristics. The Board is committed to improve every area of the Club necessary to keep our status as one of the finest public facilities in the country.



**BALBOA
TENNIS CLUB**

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Club hours of operation:

Monday - Friday 8am – 9pm

Saturday & Sunday 8am – 8pm

Club Director's Report - On the Road to 100!!!

by Colleen Ferrell



Here they are – our real heroes who have reached the Golden Age of 90 years old and are still playing the game we all love. Congrats to the Fab Five:

- 94 – Stuart Robinson
- 93 – Emilio De Pison
- 91.5 – Ken Miller
- 91 – Chuck White
- 90 – Don Goyette

This edition of the annual BTC Club Newsletter features all ages playing from 3-94. That's a pretty impressive span and not many sports can boast active participation for all those years. Indeed tennis is the sport of a lifetime and if you are lucky enough to play for that many years, you are truly blessed. "Long May You Run," as Neil Young states in his famous song.

On another note, with a wave of good luck and many thanks, we bid farewell to BTC Member and Board Member M.A. Hillier who is moving to Florida. The cover article highlights what great accomplishments M.A. has achieved in so many areas and for the benefit of BTC. She has truly gone above and beyond for this club.

Thank you members for your support of the Reservation Staff, Board of Directors, Route 6 Café, Instructors and the Pro Shop. We have a great nucleus at BTC that embodies excellence in every aspect of the club operation.



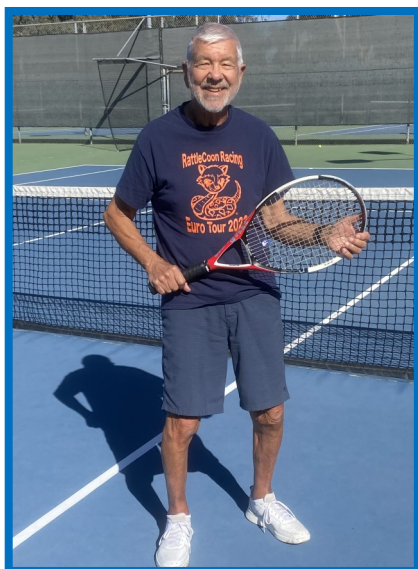
Ken Miller



Stuart Robinson



Chuck White



Don Goyette



Emilio De Pison

Rafa Martinez - Director of Junior Development



Rafa Martinez

In the past year, the junior program achieved remarkable success and growth, marked by several significant milestones. One of the most noteworthy achievements was the development of a structured pathway program, which introduced a unique and engaging approach to skill development. This program creatively incorporated color balls (red, orange, and green) to cater to various skill levels, ensuring that each player had the opportunity to progress at their own pace.

The program also shone brightly on the competitive stage with the organization of SSV tournaments, providing a platform for junior players to showcase their newfound talents and compete against peers from other programs.

Perhaps the most exciting highlight of the year was the inaugural annual trip to Spain, a journey that featured our high-performance players. This overseas expedition provided them with a unique opportunity to experience international competition and gain exposure to a higher level of play.

Looking ahead, the junior program has a slew of exciting plans that promise to further enhance the development and experiences of its participants. The introduction of our Junior Team Tennis, first Red Ball and

Orange Ball tournaments signifies an important step in providing young players with valuable competition experiences at their skill level, promoting healthy competition and growth.

The expansion of team tournament travel adds another layer of excitement, allowing junior athletes to bond and compete together as a cohesive unit. These experiences not only develop their skills, but also foster teamwork and a sense of belonging for all players who participated.

The BTC Junior Development program is also committed to holistic athlete development and is evident in its plan to host events that delve into essential aspects of becoming an athlete. Topics such as nutrition, mindset, fitness, and the role of athlete parents will provide invaluable insights for both players and their families.

Moreover, the growth of summer camps with additional activities promises a fun and enriching experience for participants during the break. These activities will complement tennis training and help in the overall development of young athletes, making summer camps a highlight of their year.

Finally, the anticipation of a second trip to Spain is bound to generate excitement and motivation. This international exposure will further hone the skills of high-performance players, providing them with invaluable experiences and perspectives on tennis at the global level.

In conclusion, the future plans for the junior program at Balboa Tennis Club reflect a commitment to all-encompassing athlete development, exciting tournaments, and memorable international experiences. These initiatives will undoubtedly elevate the program to new heights and empower its young athletes for success on and off the tennis court.

(Continued from page 1) M.A.'s dedication to the tennis community of San Diego is also seen by her voluntary time on several boards. She has served on the San Diego District Tennis Association board since 2006. She has been an active member of the BTC board since 2015. Accordingly so, M.A. received the SDDTA Community Service award in 2014. Her monetary contributions to BTC over the past years have included resurfacing of the café patio, new awnings on courts 19-24, new chairs/ tables in the BTC Clubhouse this year, in conjunction with the Belinsky family and much more. "I love playing at Balboa and seeing all the things that are happening here at the Club," she says. "I want to be a part of the great improvements and opportunities that are constantly offered to the Club members."

M.A. is married and has two adult children. In her free time besides tennis, she enjoys off-roading in the desert, pickleball, reading and scrapbooking. She, her husband Scott and beautiful golden doodle Maddie are relocating to Florida in the upcoming year. We wish M.A. well and will be forever grateful for the massive imprint she has made to Balboa Tennis Club and the San Diego Tennis Community.

BTC Member Profile - Gary Nicolai



Gary Nicolai

As a history professor in the Washington DC and Philadelphia area for 50 years, Gary Nicolai passionately shared his knowledge with high school students. “I loved every day,” he says with a smile. He has great memories of those days in the classroom where he once taught the son of Ruth Bader Ginsberg, whom he referred to as “the Judge” when she worked on the United States Court of Appeals. Gary also had the special opportunity of meeting Lyndon Baines Johnson when he ran for President in 1964. “I wanted to get involved,” Gary said. He worked over 2000 hours as a volunteer in the LBJ campaign and altogether more than any other junior campaigner, so he was allowed to attend the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. He was personally told by LBJ, “Gary, we are going to win this election – I need you – go for it!!!” Gary has since cherished this experience as a major life highlight.

In 2017, the “History Professor” abandoned the classroom and moved west to Studio City where his son lived. Growing up in a Navy family, Gary once lived in Coronado, so he was familiar with the SoCal climate and vibe. Prior to COVID - 19, Gary and his wife moved to San Diego, following his son’s family. He decided he wanted to take up tennis so he scanned the BTC website to find a pro and discovered Mimi Loucks, a former pro at the Club. He took private les-

sons, clinics, met people to play with and discovered a true tennis home at Balboa.

Gary’s penchant for history segued into tennis. Just like tracing the evolution of our country through historical time periods, Gary is following a similar path to develop a tennis game. Add in his love of solving mysteries and puzzles through analyzation, you can see a similar mindset working to improve his tennis game by breaking it apart and putting the pieces together. “I watch film, take lessons, practice on the wall and play matches,” he says. “I am getting the tools to improve by developing fundamentals.” Recreation tennis for Gary is very satisfying. “I play with different people and mostly doubles for fun,” he says. “Tennis is my cathedral and very therapeutic.”

The history professor turned tennis lover truly enjoys the game in the most pure sense. Gary values his time on the court at BTC and the opportunity to be social as well. He credits many of the BTC members with providing him regular tennis tips and friendship. “I enjoy meeting people at the Club and learning more stories about them,” he says. Every day is a new chapter for Professor Gary and in his case, a total “page flipper.” He’s enjoying the present, yet always looking to learn more about tennis, life and other players at BTC. Life is good.

Thank You from Route 6 Café

by Guillermo and Yuri Sanchez



We at Route 6 Coffee & Smoothies are grateful to be part of the Balboa Tennis Club. Since day one, our goal has been to provide amazing food, smoothies and coffee to all the members and everyone that visits Morley Field. We hope to be achieving that goal. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Balboa Tennis Club for years to come and to keep growing as a company.

We thank everyone who makes BTC and Route 6 Coffee such a great place, especially Colleen and the BTC Board of Directors, who have been supportive of what we have been building.

Route 6 Coffee & Smoothies is open every day from:

9:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Phone: 619-230-5898

Left to Right: Owners Guillermo and Yuri Sanchez, sister in law Maira, Yuri’s sisters Cindy and Marisela

Words of Wisdom from Tennis Director Hiromi Sasano



Hiromi Sasano and Matt Previdi

“Three years on a stone. Even a stone will get warm if a person sits on it for three years.” My mother used to tell me this over and over growing up. Now I get it!!! I’ve also added these affirmations to my daily life philosophy: Make steady effort every day; hard work always pays off; consistency and positive thinking are the keys to success in so many ways. It’s okay to make mistakes as long as you learn from them. The last year and half as Tennis Director at Balboa Tennis Club went way too fast. I am grateful to be in this position and very happy to have all my staff working as a team to make Balboa fun and a great tennis teaching environment for all ages. Looking forward to many years ahead at this great club!

Reflections from Adult Tennis Director Matt Previdi

When I inherited the great programs left by Geoff Griffin, I knew I had big shoes to fill. From September of 2022 to today, we have grown our programs and offerings to extend well beyond the scope of most clubs in San Diego County. Our pro staff has shown me time and time again that surrounding yourself with great people is the key to success. Their tremendous skills and dedication to our students has helped our programs grow as strong as ever. The next year for the Adult Programs at Balboa will feature new offerings, new challenges and as always amazing people. Thank you for supporting us as we are so lucky to serve such a great community of people and players.

BTC Pro Carla Zarbo



The United States Tennis Association (USTA) developed a program adapted to different skill levels to enhance progress for youth tennis players. BTC Pro Carla Zarbo currently specializes in teaching the “Red Ball” program for the “Net Generation Pathway” curriculum. Red tennis balls bounce lower and move slower through the air, giving children ages 3 and older, a chance to move their feet and take a good swing at the ball. Carla utilizes Red Ball techniques and takes her instruction to the next level in every way possible to develop these young players. “I like teaching this age group,” she says. “The kids are excited about tennis.”

Carla understands that these young students are still growing so she employs her understanding of child psychology and tennis fundamentals. Calling upon her educational experience with degrees in Psychology and Biology, Carla is able to apply knowledge of how the mind affects the body and vice versa to tennis instruction. So how does this information transform an 8-year-old into a tennis superstar? “I want to cultivate love for tennis first,” she says. Similar to the USTA philosophy for Net Generation, Carla desires to create a fun, positive, engaging atmosphere within an inclusive team culture that encourages growth – mentally, physically and emotionally – utilizing a holistic approach.

Tennis coaching is a sidekick to Carla’s professional job as a social worker for children who have experienced severe abuse and neglect. By day, she works in a different arena – the courtroom. She has devoted 22 years to her social work profession and openly admits, “I would not mind teaching full time tennis in the future.” Obviously, Carla’s work with these special needs and challenging populations laid the groundwork for her ability to relate to kids (and adults) of all ages on and off the tennis court.

Carla started working at BTC in 2022 as a Junior Development Coach and Adult Tennis Pro. She thanks Hiromi Sasano for giving her this amazing opportunity. She teaches every day after her “day job.” She believes in teaching every child to love tennis as she does. Carla has proven that tennis offers an invaluable approach to elevating anyone’s mental health – young or old. Parents have commented that Carla is “really good with the kids and has a presence on the court.” She takes pride in making sure the kids show up to learn and have fun, because they know the final reward – a popsicle after class – is worth the effort.

Steve Kappes Gives Back to Warriors at BTC



Steve Kappes

The Wounded Warrior Tennis Program at Balboa Tennis Club was started in 2009 by Steve Kappes, Geoff Griffin, and MA Hillier. “I saw an opportunity in the military community to increase access to tennis, and this was one of them,” Kappes said. Since its inception, over 1,500 veterans have benefitted from more than 500 clinics and eight week-long national tennis camps offered at Balboa Tennis Club. The program is open to any veteran in the community with a service connected disability. It is a “drop in” program where usually 20-30 players participate in on-court drills for an hour and enjoy a social lunch after the tennis.

Recreation Therapists at the Naval Medical Center San Diego and the VA Medical Center San Diego also refer patients to the WW Tennis Program. “The Warriors’ injuries are both visible and invisible, with post-traumatic stress a common condition, said Kappes. Most players are ambulatory, but we also support those who use wheelchairs and other assisted devices.” The participants range in age from 20-80, and represent all the military service branches.

The WW Program at BTC receives great support from teaching pros, club members, and community volunteers. Long time BTC Tennis Director Geoff Griffin and Steve Kappes met in 2008 at the BTC tennis courts. These two men, both with incredible qualities of altruism and a penchant for helping the Wounded Warriors, combined their energies with M.A. Hillier, who added her Recreational Therapy background to create the WW Program at BTC. Geoff’s wife Manuela, also deserves a heap of credit for spending endless hours in the kitchen, preparing the Warrior lunches every week for years. Rounding out the BTC nucleus, members Spike Lowndes, Charles Hoskowitz, Harold Lawson, Emily Zhuoling Jia and Wenhua Baurer have all been major contributors of time and energy for the weekly clinics.

“This program has turned into my passion,” says Kappes, who is a retired Navy Captain, logging in 24 years of service. He was raised in Pennsylvania and attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison where he enrolled in the Navy ROTC program. Kappes’ first assignment landed him on a ship stationed at 32nd Street, and he vowed to make San Diego his post-Navy home. He has played tennis recreationally throughout his life and says, “I have always loved tennis. Most of all, I love the people I have met through the sport and the opportunities it has created to help others.”

So now the WW Program is thriving at 14 years old. The program operates in conjunction with the San Diego District Tennis Association. Kappes is the Program Director and principal fundraiser and is continually looking for assistance. Donations for lunches, on-court supplies, and spare racquets in good condition are always appreciated. The program is also looking for volunteers to help in various capacities. He has a goal to expand the program into North County and other sites around San Diego. Finding local restaurants that are willing to provide lunches for the Warriors is also a great help to the program. As Kappes states, “We improve our Warrior’s lives through tennis and camaraderie.” If you would like to be of assistance in any way, please contact him at: stevekappes@hotmail.com, cell 619-948-4596.

Friday Night Mixed Doubles at BTC



Friday night Mixed Doubles Social takes place the first and third Fridays of the month. This event is run by BTC Members Linda Olson and Irena Hukari. There are 6 courts to accommodate 24 BTC members. Signups start at 5:30 pm. at the picnic table adjacent to court 4. Stop by if you are interested. There are no early signups. Guests and friends will be able to participate as space permits starting at 5:45 pm. Here is a group photo of the enthusiastic players from a recent mixed doubles social.

Calendar of Events

November 2023

- 18 USTA Mixed Dbls. Combo Play - 9:00am - 3:00pm
- 18 BTC Turkey Shoot - 3:00pm
- 21 BTC Board Meeting

December

- 13 Volunteer Appreciation Party - 6:00pm
- 19 BTC Board Meeting
- 25 Club Closed for Christmas Day

January 2024

- 21 BTC Board Meeting

February

- 18 BTC Board Meeting

US Open Package Winner

By M.A. Hillier



Elsa Marquez and Holly Viening

Congratulations to Elsa Marquez and her friend Holly Viening for winning the 2023 US Open package giveaway held at Balboa Tennis Club during its 100th birthday celebration May 21st. Elsa is no stranger to the San Diego community. She joined Balboa Tennis Club after she retired from the city of San Diego in 2009. She said she loved Balboa and met wonderful people to play with, many of whom became close friends. She also enjoyed the atmosphere, the friendliness of the members, and what she misses most is having coffee at the cafe after she played. She moved to Visalia in 2021, after Covid, so she could be close to her family, which was a huge adjustment for her. She has joined a fitness club in Visalia that has a good tennis program and plays doubles and takes clinics, in addition to playing pickleball. She knows she made the right decision moving to Visalia but she really misses San Diego.

The 2023 US Open package included round trip airfare from anywhere in the US to New York for 2 people, 3-night stay at the New York Hilton Midtown, unlimited daily round trip transportation from the hotel to the US Open, 2 tickets to each of 3 sessions of the US Open (one of them in the President's Box), and US Open swag.

This opportunity drawing was held for Ivan Smith, who is a dear friend of the San Diego tennis community. Ivan was critically injured in a car crash on his way to college tennis team practice in Texas in April 2022, which resulted in him being a quadriplegic. The purpose of this fundraiser was to raise enough money to purchase a wheelchair accessible van for Ivan. We were able to raise \$31,055 toward the van, but we still need more donations as the cost of a wheelchair accessible van is close to \$100,000. Tennis Channel actually flew their staff out to San Diego in July to spend three days with Ivan and his family. The documentary of that visit will hopefully be aired on Tennis Channel to provide more exposure regarding Ivan's plight. If you didn't have the opportunity to donate towards Ivan before, below is the QR code and the link to the Go Fund Me page for Ivan. <https://www.gofundme.com/f/ivan-smith-with-the-cost-of-his-recovery>

