



ADVANTAGE: Women's Tennis

The ITA Women's Collegiate Tennis Hall of Fame at William and Mary Celebrates the Legends of the Game

By Sara Piccini



The first intercollegiate tennis championship for men was held in 1883, with Harvard University's Joseph Clark winning the singles title. Women would have to wait a few more years for their own championship — 75 more years, to be exact.

The long wait can be attributed to a number of factors, including lack of funding and lack of a strong governing body for women's collegiate sports. And many college officials actively discouraged competition, touting "the spirit of play for its own sake," concerned that young women couldn't handle the competitive side of athletics.

But women were proving just the opposite on the tennis court. The great champion Helen Wills, for instance, who earned a Phi Beta Kappa key from the University of California at Berkeley in 1925, won 31 Grand Slam titles and two Olympic gold medals during the 1920s and '30s.

Inspired by these female champions, a pioneering group of women and men finally convinced the United States Lawn Tennis Association (now the USTA) to sponsor the first women's intercollegiate championship in 1958. Darlene Hard of Pomona College in California won the singles title. The following year, William and Mary's own Donna Floyd Fales '62 captured the singles title.

Women also had to wait a little longer for their own collegiate tennis hall of fame. The Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) Men's Hall of Fame opened in 1983 on the University of Georgia campus: the ITA had become the governing body for both men's and women's tennis just the year before.

Enter President Paul Verkuil '61 of the College of William and Mary. "In the late 1980s, President Verkuil attended a conference at the University of Georgia," says Millie West, honorary alumna, the longtime W&M women's tennis coach and former director of women's athletics. "He's a tennis player, so he went over to the courts and met with Dan Magill, who'd started the men's hall of fame.

"Paul asked Dan, 'What about the women?' And Dan said, 'Well, we don't have room for a women's hall of fame here.' The country singer Kenny Rogers had given money for the men's facility, so lack of funding on the women's side was an issue as well," West explains.

"At that point, as the women's athletic director, I was answering directly to the president. At Paul's urging — insistent urging — I contacted the ITA and said we'd like to house the women's hall of fame at William and Mary. Women's tennis has always been strong at the College, and so it was natural for the hall of fame to be here.

"Of course, we didn't have funding yet," West says. "And I had no idea where we were going to put it."

But as anyone who knows Millie West can attest, nothing can stop her once she's set her mind on something.

'One Giant Leap for Women's Tennis'

On April 15, 1995, the ITA Women's Collegiate Tennis Hall of Fame officially opened its doors at William and Mary. Thanks to crucial support from Mark McCormack '51, L.H.D. '97 and his wife, former tennis champion and honorary alumna Betsy Nagelsen, the Hall of Fame found a beautiful home within the College's newly dedicated McCormack-Nagelsen Tennis Center.

"The ITA Women's Hall of Fame is the only hall of fame in the



Benefactors Betsy Nagelsen and the late Mark McCormack '51, L.H.D. '97 with Hall of Fame Curator Millie West, honorary alumna.

country dedicated solely to women's tennis," notes David Benjamin, the ITA's executive director. "It really tells the story of how much women's collegiate tennis contributed to the growth of the sport overall, and helped bring about the equality in competition and pay that women professionals now enjoy.

"The ITA takes great pride in our halls of fame and will always be grateful for the tremendous support of Mark and Betsy in establishing the Women's Hall of Fame at William and Mary."

The Hall of Fame's charter class of 10 inductees included some of the game's great luminaries — including Billie Jean King, who led the battle for equality in women's tennis, and Althea Gibson, who broke the color barrier. Less familiar to those outside of tennis, but no less important, were inductees like Hazel Hotchkiss Wightman, who began the first international competition for women in 1923 with the Wightman Cup.

As the late Coach Anne Pittman of Arizona State University remarked at the 1995 induction ceremony, "Having the Women's Collegiate Hall of Fame at William and Mary is one giant leap for women's tennis."

Millie West notes that several William and Mary alumni have provided invaluable financial support to the Hall of Fame's programs since its inception, including honorary alumna Linda and Joe Montgomery '74, Carroll '62 and Patricia Bayliss Owens '62, and honorary alumnus John Jamison.

Over the years, inductees and supporters have also donated a treasure trove of artifacts to the Hall of Fame. Some of the highlights include:

- Two original Wimbledon Ladies' Singles Trophies from 1950 and 1955, donated by 1996 inductee Louise Brough. These are smaller replicas of the famous Venus Rosewater dish held aloft by all singles champions at Wimbledon each year.



The ITA Women's Collegiate Tennis Hall of Fame.



- Women's tennis clothing designed by the famous Ted Tinling, a 6-foot, 3-inch former tennis player and umpire who shaved his head and sported an earring. His flamboyant designs include a silver lamé dress worn for a Virginia Slims competition.

- Tennis rackets dating from the late 1800s to the present, showing their evolution from wood and catgut to today's composite materials. Many inductees have donated rackets, including 2010 inductee Ed Hegmann, whose pink Doris Hart autograph model racket "had caused a few physical altercations in his youth."

The Hall of Fame also includes exhibition panels for every inductee with biographical materials and photographs. A special committee selects each class of inductees from the following categories: outstanding collegiate players and coaches; players who attended college and had a significant impact on women's tennis; and individuals playing a major role in the development of women's tennis. Inductions have been held every two years since the year 2000.

The Will to Win

Tennis remains the only sport in the world where women and men compete on an equal basis, both on the collegiate and professional levels (the only difference is that women play best of three matches, versus

best of five for men, at Grand Slam events). This remarkable achievement came about in large part because of the efforts of the women and men honored at ITA Women's Collegiate Tennis Hall of Fame.

"I want as many people as possible to see the Hall of Fame, and for people to come away with an awareness of tennis heritage — and how far women's tennis has come," says Millie West, who continues to serve as the Hall of Fame's curator.

The Hall of Fame is supported completely by private funds, including an annual fund in support of the induction ceremony (see sidebar below). West created a Hall of Fame endowment several years ago, operated by the William and Mary Endowment Association, in order to secure the long-term future of the facility and its programs.

The Hall of Fame's inductees come from diverse backgrounds and have followed diverse paths after their tennis careers, but they all share the competitive drive that inspired the first women's intercollegiate championship a half century ago.

2010 inductee JoAnne Russell, still winning doubles championships three decades after her collegiate and Wimbledon titles, sums it up:

"You get older, your hair gets grayer, you get wrinkles, and you get slower, but everyone deep down inside never stops wanting to win. If I can still walk, I'll play." ■

2010 Induction Ceremony

The ITA Women's Collegiate Tennis Hall of Fame will induct six new members in a ceremony to be held on **Saturday evening, Nov. 13** at William and Mary.

The 2010 inductees include:

- **Courtney Allen** (Principia College): Winner of six NCAA Division III national collegiate titles over four years; named NCAA Rookie of the Year and Senior Player of the Year.
- **David Borelli** (University of Southern California): As USC coach, captured seven national titles over 14 seasons; named NCAA National Coach of the Year in 1981; now women's tennis coach at Texas Christian University.
- **Barbara Hallquist DeGroot** (University of Southern California): First woman to receive a full athletic scholarship at USC; winner of the 1976 and 1977 national collegiate singles titles and four team championships.
- **Ed Hegmann** (University of Mary Washington): As UMW coach, won three national collegiate titles and nine consecutive conference championships; named Division III Coach of the Year in 1988 and 1999.
- **Carrie Meyer Richardson** (Marymount College; Purdue University): Captured three USTA Girls' 18 titles and won the national collegiate singles title in 1974; coached at Purdue.
- **JoAnne Russell** (Trinity University): Won the 1975 national collegiate doubles title and played on two championship teams. In 1977, captured the Wimbledon doubles crown and shared the No. 1 world doubles ranking.

Several of the inductees have William and Mary connections. Ed Hegmann of Mary Washington worked alongside former W&M women's tennis coach Millie West as one of the pioneers of women's collegiate competition.



Betsy Nagelsen (left) and 2010 inductee JoAnne Russell pose with the Duchess of Kent after winning the 1993 Wimbledon 35-and-over doubles title.

JoAnne Russell's sister Lynn '79 played on the W&M tennis team under West, and both JoAnne and Lynn were coached as youngsters in Florida by Tommy Boys '52.

The induction ceremony includes a dinner, video tributes and remarks by each of the inductees. Many former players and coaches will make the trip to Williamsburg to honor the inductees.

The Hall of Fame invites all friends of tennis to the induction dinner and ceremony. If you are interested in attending, please contact Chris Braig, Director of Special Events, W&M Athletics at 757.221.1599 or ctbraig@wm.edu.