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## Hoffman blends tennis with work and play

By Christopher Dehning

Interviewers pride themselves on their ability to make shrewd judgements about people by watching them, how they dress, how they walk or talk, even by the way they tie their shoes.

What do you say about a man who ushers you to a table, plops down and before the skin on your palm cools from a quick handshake, begins to tick off a list of achievements as fast as he can remember them?

Greenwood Village's Irwin Hoffman has a right to be the confident and self-assured man he is. As a credible and experienced tennis pro, he perhaps has no equal in Colorado. Years ago, as a student at Denver's East High School, he was ranked first in singles and second in doubles. When he started his career, he was one of four pros in the state and managed, at one point before the Colorado Tennis Association existed to certify instructors and professionals, 13 tennis clubs. He ran them with people he had taught and certified in his own name: club owners would trust no one else to hire instructors. He has been the head pro at Green Gables Country Club for 27 years. He may be the oldest resident pro in Colorado.

"I hate to say 'oldest'," said Hoffman thoughtfully. "Longest tenured," he ventured, nodding his head.

Semantics aside, Hoffman has been recognized for his time in tennis.

Three years ago, Hoffman was given the Robineau Award for having so many of his students become professionals. The Robineau Award, named after Bud Robineau who was the president of Frontier Oil and an aficionado of tennis, is given annually to the person thought to have made the best contribution to tennis in Colorado.

"In my opinion, that's the most prestigious," he said, ranking in kudos.

As a computer science teacher at George Washington High School, Hoffman has achieved some recognition for his ability. He has a PhD in math and is tentatively scheduled to do an educational presentation on computer programming for a local channel.

Perhaps his brightest accomplishments are the kids —

the admirers and eager proteges that have endlessly streamed in and out of dull grey cyclone fences enclosing the bright courts at the clubs all around the metro area. Even in the quiet Green Gables Club he enjoys at supper time when all the kids have gone home, and Hoffman relaxes in his chair a couple are left around after a solid day of lessons, jabbering tennis talk with Hoffman, reminding him of things he forgot.

"He's really being modest," claimed Cathy Weisbart, a former Hoffman kid and now instructor at the club. She told how Hoffman, a scientific sportsman who likes to apply rules of physics to tennis, had developed a new serve for her using no backward motion, to help her deal with the limited mobility left in her shoulders after surgery years ago.

"... and it was published in a tennis magazine," she explained of the new serve.

Hoffman has a paternal, nagging kind of interest in the kids at the club to which they respond. Sometimes they have no choice.

"Sometimes I have to go down to the pool, drag them out of the water and ask them how many challenges they've made," said Hoffman, grinning at his methods for getting the kids to play one another for practice and ranking at the club.

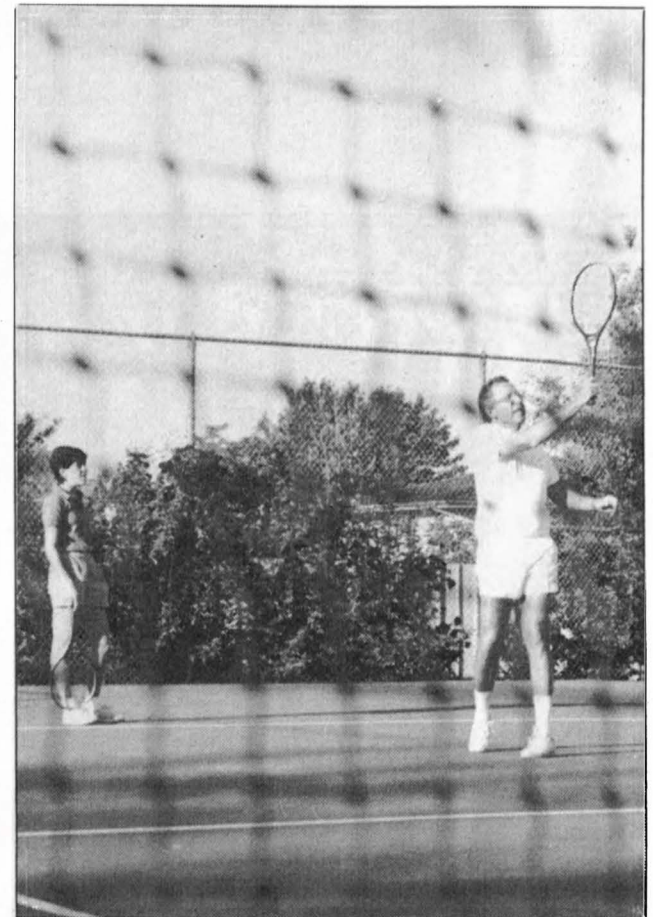
"Most of their parents I taught as kids," says Hoffman, explaining how he gets away with his unconventional approach.

The three generations of players he's taught span almost the entire history of organized tennis in Colorado; he started the Junior Interclub which now has maybe 4,000 kids in the Denver area participating in competition.

And, Hoffman remembers when he began as a pudgy youngster to play tennis as a way to become good at something athletic.

"I remember taking up tennis because I got sick of being picked last for teams at school," said Hoffman.

He chose tennis because his father knew the rules. He and a friend, Nick Siegel, played for four hours a day. When the pair finally entered a tournament, they found they were the best in the state.



Irwin Hoffman instructs a student on his Greenwood Village court.

Photo by Jim Pilon

"We only played each other. We didn't know," said Hoffman of the surprise.

Though he hasn't excelled in flashy competitive tennis, a world where only about 100 people in the world are good enough to earn big money, he has both tangible and intangible rewards for his dedication to the sport.

"I'm glad people told me about him," confessed Jeff Teitelman, one of Hoffman's aspiring junior competitors.