

COLORADO TENNIS

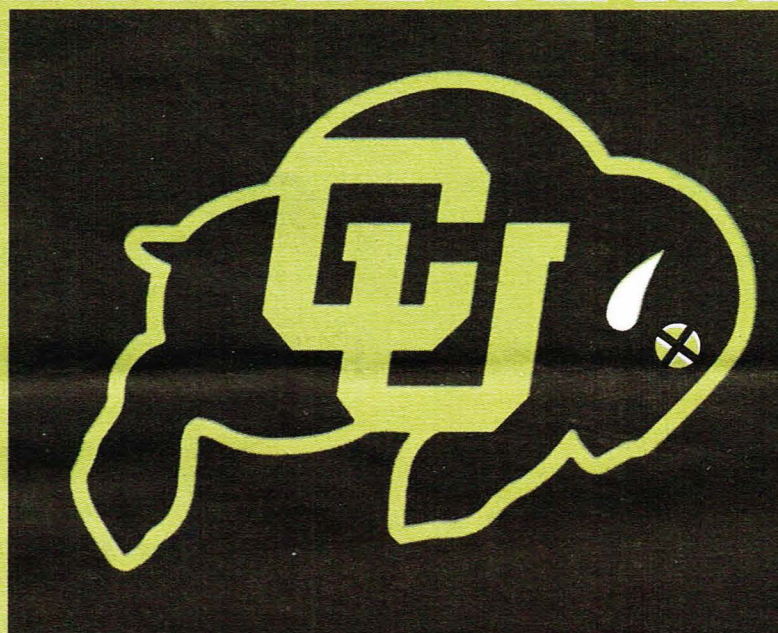
SUMMER 2006

Year 30, Issue 3

The Official Publication of Tennis Lovers

Est. 1976

FAREWELL RALPHIE



CU MEN'S TENNIS

1911-2006

IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP ITS ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT FROM SINKING UNDER THE WEIGHT OF A CRUSHING FINANCIAL DEFICIT, THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO HAS DECIDED TO ELIMINATE ITS NEARLY 100-YEAR-OLD MEN'S TENNIS PROGRAM.

DESPITE THE RATIONALE PROVIDED BY THE UNIVERSITY, THERE ARE STILL TOO MANY QUESTIONS THAT HAVE YET TO BE ANSWERED. WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON IN BOULDER?



**INTERMOUNTAIN
COLORADO**

COLORADO TENNIS ASSOCIATION
1241 South Parker Road
Suite 100
Denver, CO 80231
303.695.4116

coloradotennis.com

spotlight

TRANSCENDING TENNIS

AFTER 50 YEARS OF TEACHING, IRWIN HOFFMAN HAS LEARNED A FEW THINGS ABOUT TENNIS. AND LIFE. HE'S PASSED ALONG HIS WISDOM AND HIS PASSION TO THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS IN HIS CAREER, WHICH WILL OFFICIALLY COME TO AN END IN AUGUST.

STORY BY COLORADO TENNIS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE DOROTHY MAUK

When it comes to key words, nothing opens more doors to Irwin Hoffman's life than "Basics". Ask the veteran tennis coach virtually any question and his answer most likely will be related to fundamentals.

Hoffman, who retired this spring from a half-century reign at Green Gables Country Club, recently shared his perspective on those 50 years. Broadening the seasoned mentor's view were seven years as tennis coach at George Washington High School where he taught math for 28 years; nearly a decade as director of the Heather Ridge Racquet Club program and a shorter term at The Preserve.

"There's a lot more speed (in the game) and that's changed the basics," the 2003 Colorado Tennis Hall of Fame inductee said. "Beginning instruction is centered on group activities instead of private lessons. Players don't learn basics like they used to..... The understanding and infusion of strong basics is

undergoing a metamorphosis....It's like a pendulum swing."

Hoffman's niche was getting players started correctly, "I taught deliberative strokes but that's not part of the current philosophy," he said. Better athletes, in his opinion, can bridge today's gap. It happens naturally. For the others, it's too frustrating.

Taking lessons after you've played the game, instead of before, can triple or even quadruple the cost of learning, Hoffman said. The serve is the hardest for young players to learn but it's difficult to teach it to someone who hasn't had instruction but has started serving. He believes parents would be better off giving lessons at the outset before the strong muscle memories develop.

Hoffman encountered "basics" early in life. He learned to play the game with a loaned racquet and thrown-away balls from trash cans at the Gove Junior High and City Park courts. His first lesson came from the father of

his best friend and tennis partner, Nick Siegel. When he earned the No.1 berth on Denver East High's team, which won the state championship at City Park in 1949, he gained the support of State Tournament directors Sam and Sid Milstein, who "found" many used items to help him play. With instruction programs non-existent in the 1940s, Denver Country Club teacher Dave Gilliam let him be a ball boy so he could watch Gilliam give lessons. "I learned how to teach and play," Hoffman said.

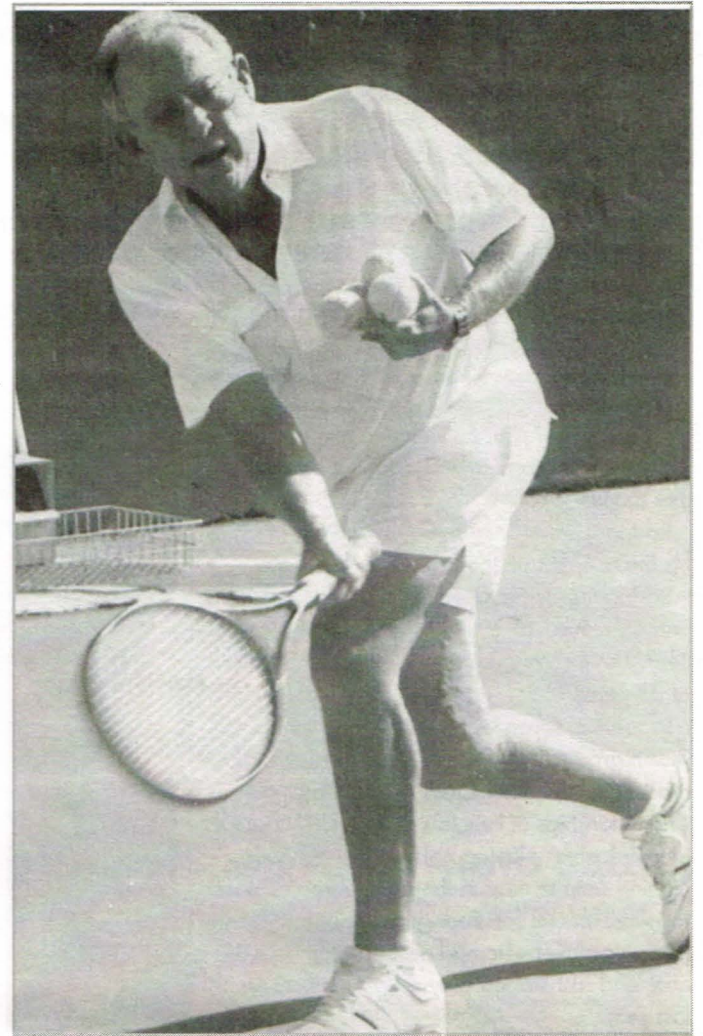
Remarkably, Hoffman's family was unaware of his tennis endeavors. When his father, a Denver East teacher for 35 years, learned of the tennis scholarship his son had been offered by the University of Denver, he initially said "You can't accept that. You're not going to college to play tennis, you're going there to learn." Fortunately for the thousands of adult and junior players Hoffman guesstimates he

has taught, and the hundreds he propelled to state, college, national and even pro achievement, he was able to do both. Hoffman played No. 3 for DU and remembers the team being "about the 10th-best in the US" with standout players like hardcourts ace Clayton Benham (No. 1), Jack Terborg and Bill Oakes.

Heeding his father's mandate, Hoffman learned enough for three DU diplomas in cognate math while maintaining his passion for tennis. After getting his bachelor's degree, he received Army Air Force meteorology training at UCLA and in Hawaii and ended up as a weatherman on Guam and Eniwetok. That enabled him to play on the Air Force Far East Tennis Team against the Philippines Military Academy, which offered him a job, and the Davis Cup team of Japan, a formidable opponent on clay.

Returning to Denver in 1957, Hoffman was hired to succeed Benham (his former Pioneer teammate) as director of tennis at Green Gables Country Club but also went back to DU to study under the GI Bill for a Masters degree and the Ph.D he later obtained.

When Sputnik went up, Hoffman decided to use the teaching certificate his dad had insisted he get. His scholastic career was



After a distinguished 50-year career as the Tennis Director at Green Gables Country Club, Irwin Hoffman is retiring in August, when he'll take on a brand new challenge: his first-ever summer vacation.

launched with one-year tours at Denver East and Denver South and then anchored at GW when it opened in 1960. In 1988, Hoffman terminated his 30 years of public school teaching and was invited to become an IBM international ambassador for "Computer Teaching of Math." As the first teacher in the nation with a computer-based math program, he was the first-year Colorado winner of the Presidential Award founded in 1983 by the National Science Foundation. IBM noticed.

Hoffman told the tech company he'd work for them if he could have three months off in the summer to teach tennis.....and they let him do that! He spent the next 12 years teaching people in Asia and Europe how to use the computer to teach math. He also gave 200-300 lectures and keynote addresses in the US on the latest computer teaching techniques while continuing to use basics for his favorite sport.

Initially, Hoffman's duties at Green Gables were sandwiched around his college classes but it didn't take long for him to develop his innovative teaching style incorporating academics and discipline. Little kids counted from one to three in seven or eight languages.

Ad In

TENNIS SHOP
AT
GREENWOOD TENNIS CENTER

SUMMER IS IN
FULL SWING

BRING THIS AD IN FOR
15% OFF
YOUR ORDER

In addition to a wide selection of apparel, bags, racquets, shoes and accessories, we offer:

- 24 Hour Stringing
- Free Stringing with Purchase of Racquet

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Come visit us at Ad-In Tennis Shop, located in the Greenwood Tennis Center, 5757 South Quebec St. Greenwood Village, CO 80111 • 303 771-2588 x 399

SPOTLIGHT

continued from page 14

Beginners received ribbons for 20 hits in a row and math games were played in the process. Every fourth grader had to write an essay on "The Life of a Tennis Ball." Teens had to learn one new SAT word each lesson day and write it down. They also had to learn cloud names, in order to identify tornados and rain. "I never talk down to kids, I make them reach up," Hoffman explained. It was not uncommon for Hoffman to jump into the pool and carry out a student who had not completed his practice requirements for that day. Tennis supporter Mary McNicholas, who took lessons from Hoffman, may have said it all when she nicknamed him "No Nonsense Irwin."

Hoffman also left his mark on the tennis landscape. With tennis instruction limited to just a few clubs in Denver, he and Arnie Brown of Cherry Hills Country Club developed an outreach program. By training their top juniors to teach tennis, and then placing them at area facilities with courts, they offered tennis instruction to many more players. The program benefited at least 15 metro area clubs. Hoffman then organized a summer league to provide competition for all the new tennis players and started a Green Gables doubles tournament, which ultimately hosted more than 1,000 players. The league, later turned over to the CTA, now attracts more than 3,000 juniors each year.

In 1980, Hoffman was awarded the CTA's most prestigious honor, the Bud Robineau Award for service to the tennis community, and was recognized by the Colorado Youth Tennis Foundation in 2000 for his longtime contributions to junior tennis in Colorado. He also received a Cherry Creek Booster Club award for his junior tennis support.

Although he taught adults, too, Hoffman will miss his interaction with the children the most. "The kids were just plain fun," he said, recalling the 6-year-old girl who, when asked how many

WITH TENNIS INSTRUCTION LIMITED TO JUST A FEW CLUBS IN DENVER, HOFFMAN AND ARNIE BROWN OF CHERRY HILLS DEVELOPED AN OUT-REACH PROGRAM. BY TRAINING THEIR TOP JUNIORS TO TEACH TENNIS, AND THEN PLACING THEM AT AREA FACILITIES WITH COURTS, THEY OFFERED TENNIS INSTRUCTION TO MANY MORE PLAYERS. HOFFMAN THEN ORGANIZED A SUMMER LEAGUE TO PROVIDE COMPETITION FOR ALL THE NEW TENNIS PLAYERS, WHICH HE LATER TURNED OVER TO THE CTA. THAT LEAGUE NOW ATTRACTS MORE THAN 3,000 JUNIORS EACH YEAR.

more consecutive hits she needed to reach the magic ribbon-earning 20, tapped her fingers one-by-one and then sat down on the court and removed her shoes to finish counting on her toes. "Where else can you have that kind of fun?" Hoffman asked. Other favorite recollections are the imaginative young lady whose essay featured a blonde tennis ball who worried about disheveling her hair flying over the net and the middle school boy who used his new word to admonish his classmates that they would be com-

mitting an "egregious" error by not voting for him to be Class President. "It was just fun," Hoffman repeated.

After 50 years of teaching it, Hoffman still sees tennis as a basic character-building sport. "Under pressure, to be honest is a wonderful trait to have," he said. "Tennis gives you the ability to depend upon yourself, be self-reliant. And it enhances concentration. That's why tennis players have the best averages in school." He believes every kid in Denver should know how to ski, play tennis and play golf.

What's the next challenge? "I'm going to take the first summer vacation of my whole life," Hoffman replied. He and Jacquie, his wife of 34 years, have scheduled a Baltic cruise for September. After that, he'll teach a few kids and get on with the coloring book for little children which he's putting together with artist Judy Fenner to illustrate the right and wrong of tennis instruction. Each page will have a "wrong picture" and a "right picture". The child has to color the correct one, and the format encourages parents to work with their children.

Looking back on his near-lifetime tennis immersion, Hoffman concluded: "Tennis has been good to me, and I think I've been good to it."

Green Gables Country Club will underscore the last half of that statement with an August 24 retirement dinner celebrating Hoffman's 50 years of service to the community. Non-club members interested in attending may phone 303/985-4433 to request a mailed invitation.