

CrossCourt

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Making the Case

The rules have changed for 10 and Under Tennis. Find out what it means for you and the future of American tennis.



MISSOURI VALLEY

The USTA Missouri Valley publishes CrossCourt on a quarterly basis, focusing specifically on the members and events in the section. All material is copyright USTA Missouri Valley, unless otherwise noted. This is our 23rd issue of CrossCourt, and the third in the sixth volume.

Your feedback is welcome.



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Gwen Moore. She has been a volunteer for years and has even served as a "ball-kid" for the US Open USTA Wheelchair Championships in St. Louis. Now she's the president of the St. Louis district and she recently sat down with **CrossCourt** to talk about how she got into tennis and her vision for the future.

By the Numbers

2,808

Size in Sq. Ft. of a full-sized tennis court

Size in Sq. Ft. of a modified 36-foot court **756**

3,325

ATP Points for Andy Roddick

ATP Points for Jack Sock **23**

70,000

Number of balls used at the 2010 US Open

Number of balls used in a typical recreational tennis match **3**

3,744

Number of balls used during the 2010 USTA Missouri Valley League Section Championships

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“People in our profession are just going to have to be patient and persistent. Because in the end, we're doing this to develop better players.”

-Melissa McCorkle
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story by Jackie Lincoln

theSERVE

OLIVIA
with Sneed

Missouri Valley Female Junior Player of the Year, Olivia Sneed, is well on her way to making a name for herself in the tennis world. The fifteen year-old Prairie Village, Kansas, resident sat down with **CrossCourt** to talk about her favorite tennis memories, superstitions and how she spends time off the court.

When did you first start playing tennis?

I was five and there were tennis clinics at the middle school in Wellington, Kansas. It was just something for kids my age to do.

What attracted you to the game?

I enjoyed playing in Wellington and went to Genesis then started go to Wichita Country Club. That's pretty much when I got started. I enjoyed it more than anything else.

Where do you play now?

I'm now a freshman at Shawnee Mission East, but I didn't play high school tennis because I got a wild card into a pro tournament at the Plaza Tennis Center in September. I practice at Hilltop Tennis Center with KC United Tennis and my coach Eric Rand.

What type of USTA events have you participated in recently?

I recently participated in the Sweet 16 and won the Girls 18s. The week before I played the Super in Wichita and got sixth in the Girls 18s.

What are some of your notable accomplishments in USTA competition?

Before I have been No. 1 in 14s and 16s and now I'm No. 1 in 18s. Last year I was Missouri Valley Girls Player of the Year.

What is one of your favorite tournament or tennis memories?

Probably last year at the Easter Bowl in Palm Springs. I went with KCUT and my coach. It was a really fun tournament. I got to the semis of the back draw and I had fun watching my fellow tennis mate win a gold ball.

Also probably the Gateway Tournament in St. Louis. It was the first national tournament I won in Girls 16s.

Any superstitions before big matches or pre-tournament?

I always wear the same black headband. It depends, certain outfits I won't wear when playing certain opponents. If I win a final in an outfit I'll wear it again in a different final.

If you could meet one player who would it be and why?

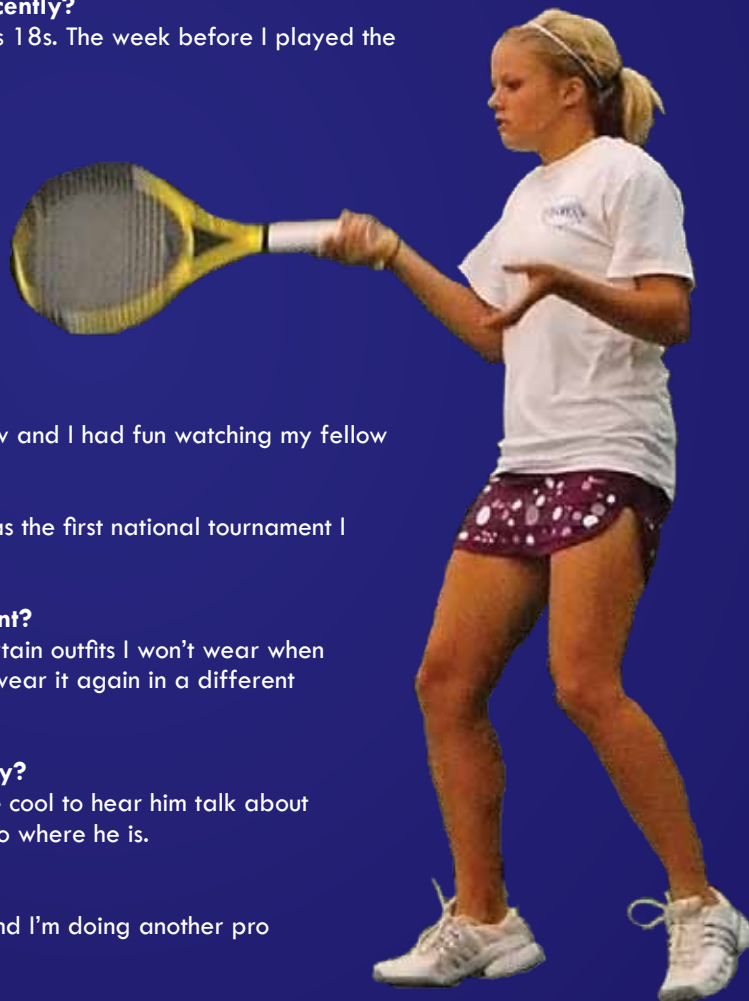
Rafael Nadal. He's my favorite tennis player. It would be cool to hear him talk about all his accomplishments, what he's done and how he got to where he is.

What is your upcoming tennis schedule like?

I'm going to Easter Bowl in Palm Springs again in April and I'm doing another pro tournament in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

When you aren't playing tennis how do you spend your time?

I like to hang out with my friends. I go boxing sometimes at Title Boxing Club in KC. I also like to shop. When I'm not playing tennis I also like to be lazy and lay around the house and watch television.





THE CASE

for 10 AND Under Tennis

by Eli Gieryna

A

Ah, inertia. There is an oft-cited quote regarding the difficulty we can have in altering our present course: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

No one is entirely sure who first said it, but it's been attributed to people from Albert Einstein to Mark Twain to Ben Franklin.

Tennis for players under the age of 10 is indeed changing in the United States. Beginning in 2012, all 10-and-under tournaments will be played using slower-moving and lower-bouncing balls on smaller courts. Players will be required to use shorter and lighter racquets.

The move is in line with the International Tennis Federation's proposed rule change and will take effect on January 1, 2012 – like it or not.

Why change now?

In general, the standard way of teaching beginning tennis players has remained unchanged for decades. Young kids stand in a single-file line and awkwardly wield racquets half the size of their bodies. An instructor feeds a yellow ball in the direction of the player, who will dutifully drag their racquet through the air, possibly making contact with the ball, or possibly the unfortunate player standing behind them, or perhaps nothing at all. They then retreat to the back of the line and wait.

"I just don't think it's real tennis."

Regardless of the quote's origin, its meaning rings clear: despite our best intentions, leaving behind our comfortable behaviors and routines can be a daunting task.

But if the United States wishes to not only combat the recent lack of American tennis champions but also bring tennis to a wider audience of young players, it will have to leave behind its old ways of teaching the game.

In this format, kids are set up for failure. The racquets are too heavy, the balls bounce too high and the net might as well be Fenway Park's Green Monster. And when players struggle to learn basic strokes, it's tough to imagine teaching more advanced concepts like court strategy, footwork and shot placement.

Mind you, not all tennis lessons are conducted in this manner, but the practice remains all too common throughout the country.

In the new 10 and Under format, the breakdown is simple. Low-compression balls don't bounce as high or move as fast, allowing players more time to get in position and develop better stroke patterns. Children can better control a smaller racquet, and the smaller court sizes allow them to cover more of the playing surface.

Best of all, scaling down the format allows kids to begin rallying sooner, not just hitting balls while in line. They find themselves actually playing points, just like the players they see on television. Having more early success leads to kids wanting to play more frequently.

"My kid can already hit on a full-sized court."

Alan Douglas, the director of tennis at Creve Coeur Racquet Club and Sunset Country Club in St. Louis, has been running his 10-and-under programs with the modified format for several years now.

To those who would say smaller courts and modified tennis balls don't represent "real" tennis, Douglas points to other youth sports.

"A 10-year-old shouldn't have to cover the same court as Roger Federer," Douglas says.

"Every other sport – whether it's baseball, basketball, soccer – they're all scaled to fit young players.

"This is how I've always taught tennis; I'm not changing now."

In this format, you have six-year-olds

playing actual tennis matches. There's a big, big difference between actually playing tennis and just trying to survive on a full court. "

The improvements, Douglas says, are rapid.

"You can see them figuring it out as they move along," he says. "You see kids who are seven, eight years old coming to the net and putting the ball away. There's no way that happens with a yellow ball on a full sized court. They have so much more fun actually being able to play the game."

Melissa McCorkle, the director of tennis at LaFortune Tennis Center in Tulsa, agrees that this format leads to more play opportunities for children and therefore a better experience.

"I think the best part is that they can start playing games quicker, and that's what kids want to do," she says. "The idea of seeing kids rally right away is really enticing to parents. We've had kids with little to no experience come in and be able to hit 10-to-12-ball rallies after just an hour."

She adds, "They're able to learn the concept of a rally, rather than hitting a ball or two on a full court and being done. That means we're developing smarter players."



photo courtesy of Creve Coeur Racquet Club
Three kids in the Creve Coeur program give their opinion of the QuickStart Tennis play format.

Getting the Word Out

Both Douglas and McCorkle agree that the biggest challenge is simply communicating to a wide audience and ensuring that people understand the reasons behind the change.

Douglas holds regular informational nights at his club in hopes of educating parents and coaches about the changes. But to him, the biggest piece of evidence is simply when parents see their children play after even brief exposure to the program.

"I tell you, people's jaws hit the ground when they see what their children are doing with this," he says.

The age-modified format has been commonly used in Europe and other parts of the world for more than 20 years. Douglas and other coaches sometimes will use video footage of young European players using the format as evidence.

Douglas also points to more local events as evidence. Last fall, he coached a team at a 10-and-under event in Springfield, Missouri, that featured players from multiple districts across the Missouri Valley section.

"The last match of the day was between a six and a seven year old, and the atmosphere was tremendous," he says. "They were playing real tennis, hitting drop shots, overheads, lobs. You can talk about it all you want, but you have to see it to really believe the difference."

A Patient Approach

Douglas also admits that part of the difficulty in educating other coaches comes from the equipment changes. Using the QuickStart Tennis format does require extra equipment and time to set

up the courts, but he says that shouldn't be a factor.

"You have to be player-oriented," he says. "You have to be willing to set up all the nets and take them down. I think for some pros, they just don't want to set the different nets up. I'm down early [before lessons] to set things up, and I have helpers, too. But bottom line, you have to be willing to do what's best for the players."

McCorkle agrees. "People in our profession are just going to have to be patient and persistent," she says. "Because in the end, we're doing this to develop better players."

The bottom line is making sure that more kids have a better immediate experience with tennis. When players have early success with the sport, their confidence grows and they are more eager to return. And the more kids who are playing tennis, the better.

Douglas sends out the same message in hopes of inspiring his young players to continue playing.

"I tell kids that there are a lot of ways to get to the top – academies, public parks, and so on," he says. "It can be a kid who started with a QuickStart Tennis driveway kit."

He adds, "Because you never know. The next top player could come from anywhere. Our job is just to get them started."

The Rule

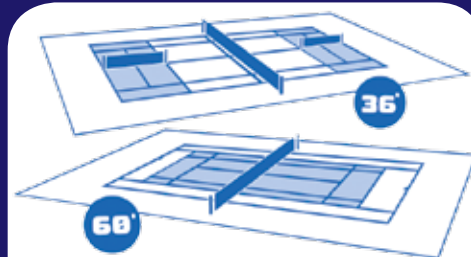
The new rules require that 10-and-under tournaments be played using slower-moving and lower-bouncing balls on smaller courts and utilizing shorter, lighter racquets. This move follows the International Tennis Federation's rule change, and will take effect on January 1, 2012. It applies to all USTA-sanctioned events for children 10 and under.

The Specs

- Ages 9-10:
- ~ 60-foot courts
 - ~ Orange, low-compression balls
 - ~ 3-foot nets
 - ~ More experienced players will play on 78-foot courts with green lower-compression balls

- Ages 8 and under
- ~ Red felt or foam balls
 - ~ 36-foot courts
 - ~ Nets of 2 feet, 9 inches

The Courts



More information: 10andUnderTennis.com



photo courtesy of Creve Coeur Racquet Club
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Net Notes

The **Kansas City Explorers'** thrilling run to the 2010 World TeamTennis Pro League title inspired fans of all ages, including the **KC Masters**, a team of rec players age 60 and over, who won the Super Senior 4.0 Division of the **WTT Recreational League**. KC Masters edged Team Davis of Encino, Calif., 28-24 in the finals to win their first WTT National title. Led by captain Jane Maloy of Smithville, Missouri, the Masters were undefeated through three days of competition at the Indian Wells Tennis Center.

Woodside Racquet Club in Westwood, Kansas, has been named **Racquet Sports Industry's/American Sports Builder's Association** outstanding outdoor facility of the year for 2010. Woodside features both indoor and outdoor courts, and the panel of judges specifically recognized the improvements that were made to the outdoor courts. The panel cited the remodeling of the courts, the unique shelter to provide shade for the players and the stadium court seating.

Racquet Sports Industry recently announced their 2010 Champions of Tennis. The USTA Missouri Valley had two winners. **Rick Walsh** of Kansas City, Kansas, was awarded the Sales Rep of the Year award for his work with Babolat. Additionally, **Dwight Davis Tennis Center** in St Louis' Forest Park was selected as the Public Park of the Year; fitting because they hosted the 84th Annual National Public Parks Tennis Championships last year.

Twenty-one wheelchair tennis programs across the country were recently awarded USTA Grassroots Wheelchair Program Grants. Awards were given to local organizations that promote and develop the growth of wheelchair tennis and use the sport of tennis to build stronger, healthier communities. Three USTA Missouri Valley organizations were awarded grants: the **Orthotic & Prosthetic Assistance Fund, Inc.**, Waterloo, Iowa (\$1,800); **SportAbility of Iowa**, Solon, Iowa (\$3,450); and **Wheelchair Sports, Inc.**, Wichita, Kansas (\$2,800). "We are thrilled to again recognize local organizations across the country that are committed to promoting and growing wheelchair tennis," said Dan James, USTA national manager, wheelchair tennis, "These grants are just a part of the continued effort in implementing important programs that reach out to the wheelchair community through tennis."



Nathan and Cliff Price of Tulsa, Oklahoma, won the USTA National Senior Father and Son Clay Court Championships held this fall at the Landings Racquet Club in Sarasota, Fla. Nathan is a former Missouri Valley No. 1 ranked 18 and under singles player and was ranked No. 43 nationally.

The USTA Player Development recently announced that three junior development programs – the **Kansas City United Tennis Academy** at the Plaza Tennis Center in Kansas City, Mo., the **Overland Park Racquet Club** in Overland Park, Kan., and the **Tucker Tennis Academy** at the Grand Health & Racquet Club in Tulsa, Okla. – have been named USTA Certified Regional Training Centers as part of its continuing effort to develop the next generation of American players. These programs will enhance the training and development of junior players in the USTA Missouri Valley section. USTA Player Development will use these new partnerships as vehicles to educate and collaborate with junior tennis coaches throughout the section to work together towards developing the next generation of American players.

USTA Serves, the national charitable foundation of the USTA, announced in January that it has awarded 33 year-end grants totaling \$420,650. Three USTA Missouri Valley organizations were awarded grants: **The KIPP Endeavor Academy** in Kansas City, Missouri (\$20,000); **The Orthotic and Prosthetic Assistance Fund** in Waterloo, Iowa (\$10,000) and **United Neighbors** in Davenport, Iowa (\$15,000). The bi-annual granting process, was developed to provide people with disabilities and disadvantaged, at-risk children in underserved communities the opportunity to learn to play tennis and improve their academic skills in a structured format, and also to help combat obesity by promoting healthy lifestyles.

The St. Louis district hosted their second annual Tennis on Campus Winter Invite in late January at Creve Coeur Racquet Club. Eight club teams competed in the event with the **University of Missouri - Columbia** (pictured) edging out Washington University for the weekend crown.



Missouri Valley natives **Jack Sock** and **Blake Strode** finally crossed paths at a recent Futures event. The duo faced off against one another in the doubles championships of the 2010 USTA Palm Coast Men's Futures Championship in Palm Coast, Florida. The 18-year old Sock partnered with Dimitar Kutrovsky (Bulgaria) and Strode, a University of Arkansas graduate, played alongside American Greg Oullette. The match came down to the wire with a tiebreaker played in place of the third set, where Sock and Kutrovsky eventually prevailed by a tally of 10-8 to nab the 6-3, 3-6 (10-8) win. The doubles finals was Sock and Kutrovsky's fifth final in their last seven events played together.



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ON COURT WITH ... GWEN MOORE

story by Jackie Lincoln



CrossCourt: How long have you been involved in tennis and in what capacity?

Gwen Moore: I came to tennis late. I started playing late in 1997 when some friends finally persuaded me to give tennis a try. I hit a few times and went to a few Play Tennis America events. I met some women there and we ended up starting a 2.5 league team. None of us really knew what we were doing, but the coaches running the event agreed to help us out. I was not a very good player, and I know the coaches didn't think I would ever be able to keep the ball in play, but eventually I started to get the hang of it. After that, I was hooked and always looking for someone to hit with. I became team captain the next season and my team went to [USTA League] Nationals in 1999. We didn't win, but we had a great time in Arizona. I was a captain for seven years and we went to sectionals a couple more times.

How did you first get involved as a USTA volunteer?

Through being a team captain, I met the district staff at meetings and tournaments. They were always nice, friendly and helpful and invited anyone who would listen to help out. I took them up on the invitation and ended up on the board for the St. Louis district. I served two terms as secretary and two terms as VP of Community Development. I have also served as the diversity chairperson for St. Louis for the past eight years and served two terms on the Missouri Valley nominating committee.

What are you looking forward to most as the new St. Louis district president?

I think the St. Louis district is on the right track. We are growing

Fourteen years ago, Gwen Moore was introduced to tennis by a group of friends and it has since become her work and her passion. Moore has volunteered for various positions on USTA Missouri Valley boards and committees and recently became the USTA St. Louis district president. Moore took time out of her busy schedule to sit down with CrossCourt and talk about her life, her involvement with the US Open USTA Wheelchair tournament and her new position as district president.

the game, adding new leagues, getting more kids and their parents involved through Jr. Team Tennis and other programs. There is always room for improvement and I look forward to hearing from and listening to anyone who has an idea we can use to continue to grow the game to make it more inclusive. We have a lot of tennis players in St. Louis, but there are also so many people who do not play, who think they are too old or it's just not for them. I would really like to help change their minds and convince them that tennis is a game you can come to when you are six or 60-plus.

What is your involvement with the St. Louis US Open USTA Wheelchair event and how did you first get involved?

I first heard about wheelchair tennis in St. Louis when the tournament was called the ROHO. Every year at the district board meetings there was a call for volunteers. Every time I wanted to volunteer but something always seemed to come up and keep me from doing so. Finally, I was able to work a Saturday as a ball person and was inspired. Despite the challenges the players faced, some even having to tape the racquets to their hands, it was clear they loved tennis. Each year after that, I was able to volunteer at least one day for the tournament. When the event became the US Open USTA Wheelchair tournament I continued to volunteer as a ball person. Some of the matches I worked were for local players and some were for international level players on center court. Despite how sore I was at the end of the day -- and believe me, I was sore -- this was a very worthwhile experience and I would encourage anyone with a few free hours to volunteer for this event when it comes around at the end of the summer. And if you can't volunteer, come out and watch some really great tennis!

What is the most rewarding part of volunteering with tennis?

The most rewarding part of volunteering is feeling like you are part of something and feeling like you are making a difference. Giving part of yourself, giving your time changes things in ways that are not always apparent. I like to think of volunteering as dropping a stone into the water and causing ripples or like a butterfly flapping its wings in the Amazon forest causing a tidal wave on the other side of the world. You may not immediately see the effect you have on others, but it is there nevertheless.

What is your favorite tennis memory or experience?

We used to have a 24-hour tennis marathon. It started Friday evening at 6 p.m. and ended Saturday evening at 6 p.m. I loved the challenge of being on court for a lot of that time. I always stayed overnight to play. Nothing beats a game at 2 a.m. after you've put in a full day of work and played tennis for half the night. I was never able to make it all the way through Saturday, but felt I had more than made my contribution through the nighttime hours. The marathon is no more and I miss it, but I have my memories -- and the T-shirts.

When you are not doing tennis activities how do you enjoy spending your time?

I read a lot, ride my bike and watch the Tennis Channel.

What else should we know about you?

Tennis is a great sport that can teach us all a lot about getting along and how to deal with both winning and losing. I hope to help the St. Louis district continue to grow and encourage everyone to play tennis and volunteer in whatever capacity you choose. Give something back to your community, it helps you and it helps others.



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