

CrossCourt

Vol. 4 No. 4

Summer 2009

missourivalley.usta.com

Special
Pull-Out
Poster
Inside



MISSOURI VALLEY

Breaking Barriers

A KC Group
Shares the Love



SUMMERTIME MEANS IT'S TENNIS TIME FOR EVERYONE!

School's out so let the games begin! We've certainly had a "QuickStart" to our summer tennis season and it's hard to believe we're heading into the summer months already. For the first time, all seven of our districts will be offering QuickStart tournaments this summer. Do your part and get those 10-and-under players out there enjoying our sport right away with the format that makes it easy to pick up a racquet and have fun from day one!

May was a very busy month with Tennis Block Parties, Recreational Coach Workshops, a wheelchair coaches workshop and player clinic and QuickStart workshops. We're training lots of folks out there, so let's utilize their new-found skills! Make sure there's summer programming at your neighborhood courts for both youth and adults.

Now is prime-time USTA Jr. Team Tennis season. Check out our Web site for the latest information on Jr. Team Tennis and teams forming in your area.

It's great fun to have boys and girls playing together in a fun, yet competitive environment. Jr. Team Tennis provides play by age and skill level so everyone has a great time. Parents, you can be the coach, team organizer and of course team cheerleader!

Please continue to use our Web site as a resource for all the happenings within the Missouri Valley. To help you this summer, this issue of CrossCourt includes a special pull-out poster of our summer events (pages 5-6). You can also follow us on Twitter and we'll let you know of special items just posted to the Web. Our junior competitive players are making a splash at the high school, state, national and collegiate levels. We also rely on YOU to keep us in the know about special achievements on and off the court.

We rely on our volunteers to lead us in our mission to promote and develop the growth of tennis. We continue to empower our Community Tennis Associations to be the leaders in their tennis communities through advocacy



and the summer contest "Best Tennis Town" (page 9). The growth of tennis in the Missouri Valley directly relates to our enthusiastic volunteers working with our staff members!

The USTA strives to grow the game in each and every community and in each and every demographic. This month we celebrate the Kansas City Tennis Alliance (pages 7-8), the first LGBT tennis group in the Missouri Valley and their work to grow the game, one passionate tennis player at a time.

Let me hear from you with ideas and suggestions to enhance our outreach into your communities. We're in this together. Teamwork. One Team. One Goal.

Here's to a productive summer of health and the sport of a lifetime. Let's have some fun!

See you on the courts!

Best Ever!

The 2009 USTA Missouri Valley Yearbook was the best ever!

*Marcella Webster Armstrong
Stuart, Okla.*

A Great Asset!

Thank you for once again publishing an outstanding Missouri Valley Yearbook. It looks amazing and your staff did a great job.

In today's era of having all the information you want on the Internet, it is still nice to have a comprehensive yearbook that gives you all the contact information you need at your fingertips. I think it's an invaluable asset to our parents and coaches to be able to find the staff and volunteers they need to contact in one place.

In addition, it is nice to honor our award winners in print - they deserve it. Thank you again for your service to our tennis community in the Missouri Valley.

*Lisa Minihan
Norman, Okla.*

Oklahoma Vice President - Juniors



2009 Yearbook Corrections

Page 21: The photo of Brooke Withrow was incorrectly labeled as Arlette Rojano.

Page 43: The 6.0 Super Senior Women's team photo was incorrectly labeled as the 7.0 Super Senior Women's team.

WRITE TO CrossCourt

CrossCourt welcomes your comments and suggestions. If you'd like to see your comments in a future issue, e-mail crosscourt@movalley.usta.com or mail us at **CrossCourt**, 6400 West 95th Street - Suite 102, Overland Park, Kansas 66212.

From The Alley
Letters to the Editor

The USTA Missouri Valley publishes CrossCourt quarterly, focusing specifically on the members and events in the section. All material ©USTA Missouri Valley, unless otherwise noted. This is our 16th issue of CrossCourt, and fourth in the fourth volume.

Your feedback is welcome.



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WANT MORE TENNIS?

Log on to missourivalley.usta.com daily for the latest news and events from across the section.

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BLAKE STRODE

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS ATHLETICS



TIM DICESARE

FOR MORE ON TIM AND THE KANSAS CITY TENNIS ALLIANCE, READ THEIR STORY ON PAGE 7.

League Player Profile:

Karen Kinderknecht

by Eli Gieryna

When Karen Kinderknecht first picked up a tennis racquet 35 years ago, she just wanted a little exercise.

And now at age 70, the Topeka resident can't put her racquet down.

"I just love the exercise," she said. "It makes you feel good, you know?"

With the weather warming up across the USTA Missouri Valley, Kinderknecht is preparing herself for another season of USTA Leagues, a program designed to give adult players a chance to compete in a team environment. Though she's unsure of the exact dates, Kinderknecht says she's been playing in the USTA League program for "about 25 years" and she's excited to tally yet another year of experience this summer.

"You make so many lasting, great friends while playing over the years," she said. "That's what I remember most about Leagues."

This year, Kinderknecht will serve as captain of a 3.5 League team, as well as participate on a 4.0 senior team. She's been a captain many times before, and has even experienced the excitement of advancing to the USTA League National Championships.

"I've been to the national championships twice for super seniors," she said. "Unfortunately, the last time we went, in 2003, it rained the entire time in Palm Springs. I kept thinking, 'It never rains in Palm Springs; why is it raining now?'"

Karen's love of tennis has been passed on to her family as well. Her son, Jim Kinderknecht, of Columbia, Mo., is the father of the 2008 USTA Missouri Valley Family of the Year. Karen's three grandchildren — Kyle, Jay and Kelsey — all played tennis in high school.

"They've really gotten into tennis as a family," she says. "I'm glad I was able to help pass that down to them."

In addition to her interest in tennis, Kinderknecht is an all-around athlete; she's an avid golfer who, at one time, carried a 12 handicap. She has been extremely active in the Kansas Women's Golf Association, once serving as president of the organization, as well as a tournament director.

And on top of that, perhaps most impressively, she trained



photos courtesy of Karen Kinderknecht
Karen Kinderknecht with Wood Valley's former tennis pro Adam Wood (above).
Karen's son Jim and his family were the 2008 USTA Missouri Valley's Family of the Year. All three of Karen's grandchildren play tennis (below).



heavily as a figure skater in her youth. She began figure skating at age eight, and by the time she was a teenager, she traveled to Colorado to train for six hours a day. All of that hard work culminated in a rare opportunity for her.

"When I was 18, I was actually invited to tour with the Ice Capades," she says. "But all of my friends were going to college, so I wanted to go, too. Looking back, I guess I wish I had gone, but college was important, too."

But golf and figure skating aside, tennis remains her and her family's biggest passion. After recovering from shoulder surgery a year ago, she's excited to get back on the courts this summer and compete in another USTA League season.

"I'm a competitive person," she says, with a laugh. "So it'll be nice to get out there again and compete, but also have some fun."

"It really is a great game, and I'm so glad to be able to play it. We'll have fun out there, that's for sure." 🎾

For more information on how you can join or start a USTA League team, visit us online at missourivalley.usta.com and click on "USTA League Tennis."



MISSOURI VALLEY

As a USTA Member, you show the world how much you appreciate tennis. In return, we want to show how much we appreciate you by offering a variety of exclusive benefits and one-of-kind offers available only to our members.



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Sandals

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Visit missourivalley.usta.com for all the details!
Click the "Benefits" option under "Membership"

To take advantage, visit usta.com/membership

Questions?
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913-322-4826
or
1-800-990-USTA (8782)



2009 Summer Eve

MISSOURI VALLEY

Segment II Super 1

June 5 - 10
Omaha, Neb.



Red Earth Festival

June 5 - 7
Oklahoma City

Segment II Super 2

June 12 - 17
Springfield, Mo.



Segment II Sweet 16

June 19 - 22
Kansas City, Mo.

Women's \$10k Pro Circuit

June 22 - 28
Wichita, Kan.

5s and Open Adult Outdoor Championship

July 10 - 12
Oklahoma City



WTT St. Louis Aces at Springfield Lasers

July 10
Springfield, Mo.
*USTA Member Appreciation Night
**featuring Anna Kournikova



2009 USTA Husband and Wife Tennis Court Open the USTA Family

July 10 - 12
Kansas City

june

july

Every Month is Tennis Month!

May was Tennis Month! (But it's always tennis month!) All across the Missouri Valley, people of all ages were introduced to the game of tennis, the sport of a lifetime, through special tennis events, workshops and Tennis Block Parties.

Relive some of the magic of the events held this year. Block Parties can be held anytime during the year to help promote your community programming and introduce people to tennis. Every state in the section proclaimed: "May is Tennis Month!"



Events in the Missouri Valley



USTA Missouri Valley Jr. Team Tennis Section Championships

August 5 - 8
Kansas City, Mo.



USTA National and Wife Hard Championships and USTA Missouri Valley Championships

August 12
Kansas City, Mo.



USTA Missouri Valley League Section Championships

August 13 - 16
Oklahoma City



USTA Missouri Valley League Section Championships

August 27 - 30
Oklahoma City

WTT Sacramento Capitals at Kansas City Explorers

July 14
Kansas City, Mo.
*USTA Member Appreciation Night

Men's \$10k Futures Pro Circuit

July 20 - 26
Joplin, Mo.

Women's \$10k Pro Circuit

July 27 - August 2
St. Joseph, Mo.

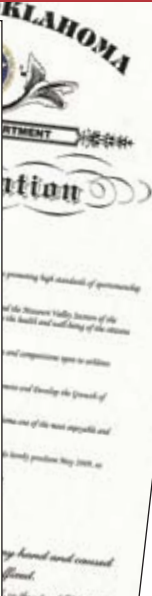
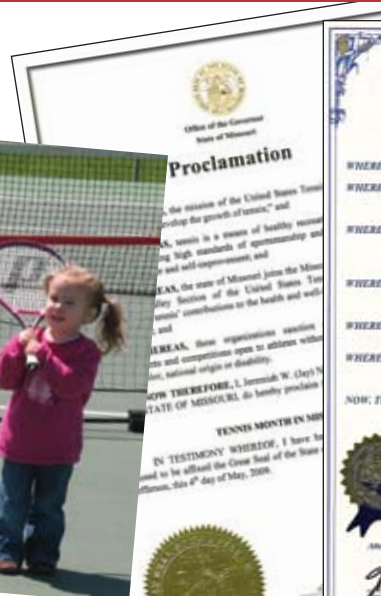
Men's \$10k Futures Pro Circuit

July 27 - August 2
Godfrey, Ill.

WTT Springfield Lasers at St. Louis Aces

July 21
St. Louis
*USTA Member Appreciation Night
**featuring Kim Clijsters

august





A Shared Love

by Richard Dedor

This night is like almost any other night on tennis courts across the USTA Missouri Valley. The courts are full of tennis enthusiasts. The sounds of the ball are all around. There is an electricity in the air that suggests that this will be a great night for tennis.

Assembled at the Plaza Tennis Center on this night are 16 men and women that come from all walks of life. They include counselors, writers, graphic designers, city employees, managers and engineers. Some are recent college graduates while others are enjoying retirement. While many play in local USTA leagues and tournaments, some are just returning to the game after a lengthy absence.

These players are as diverse a group as you will find on a tennis court, but there are two commonalities they all share.

They love the game of tennis. And they are all members of Kansas City's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community.

On the eve of its first anniversary, the Kansas City Tennis Alliance, the USTA Missouri Valley's only tennis group for LGBT players, continues to grow in numbers and in community pride. The group's founder, Brian Sullivan, believed it was time for tennis to join other gay sports offered throughout Kansas City.

"I started the Kansas City Tennis Alliance because I wanted to offer gay and lesbian tennis players a fun and welcoming place where they could improve their games while making new friends," Sullivan said. "I think there remains a myth in society that gay and lesbian people don't enjoy or participate in sports. This group shatters that myth – in our first year, we have over 100 players who are passionate about the game of tennis."

After some initial research into organizing the group, Sullivan came across the USTA's Diversity Statement and its inclusion of sexual orientation, and soon contacted the Missouri Valley's diversity manager, Fred Johnson.

"For me and the USTA, it's all about playing tennis and Brian wanted to organize this diverse group of players and we were happy to help," Johnson said.

Following a couple months of planning and promotion, the Kansas City Tennis Alliance held its kick-off event at the Plaza Tennis Center on June 28,

2008. 25 players participated in two hours of beginner and intermediate clinics led by tennis professionals, including open singles and doubles play.

"One of my proudest moments was looking out over those courts, and seeing so many players enjoying the sport as much as I do," Sullivan said. "From the start, I wanted to create a space where LGBT tennis players of all skill levels could practice their skills, and receive ongoing support and encouragement from their peers."

Since its inception, the group has organized weekly play at both the Plaza Tennis Center and the Rockhill Tennis Club.

"While a few of our players may be competitive, most are coming out each week for the social and recreational benefits that tennis provides," Sullivan said.

Some of the players would be playing even without this group, but for others, this group brought them back to the game. "I have played tennis for a long time, but this group has energized my passion for the game again," says Jason Sportsman.

Eric Jacobs left tennis for a period of time, but came back because this group offered a physical and social outlet to play and meet new people. "The group has provided me with an opportunity to get back into the game," Jacobs said.

Shelley Long had not picked up a racquet in years. After encouragement from her friend Dan Grippo, Long joined him at this weekly session – a first for both players – with a brand-new racquet in hand. "His passion and interest for tennis helped me get hooked on the sport again," Long said.

Rishad Gandhi stopped playing for several years when he had no one to play with. That changed after he joined the Tennis Alliance. It has helped him find new hitting partners as well as new friends.

Tim DiCesare who recently moved to Kansas City found the group and has been coming ever since. "I knew no one in Kansas City and it was a great way to get more connected and play tennis at the same time," DiCesare said.



Tennis has long been a recreational sport shared among friends and this group makes sure everyone feels at home, on and off the court.

"For me, I think one of the most rewarding benefits of forming this group has been the quality of the friendships that have been made," Sullivan said. "It has been so satisfying to organize a group around a sport that I love. To have other people validate my efforts by making it a place that they want to come back to week after week – that's just icing on the cake."

Last December, Sullivan was invited to speak about the group to the USTA Missouri Valley's Diversity Committee meeting at the Annual Conference in Overland Park, Kan. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed vice-chair to the committee.

In just one year, Sullivan has gone from merely the idea of a LGBT tennis group in Kansas City to dreams of assisting other communities in the Missouri Valley in reaching out to this often-hidden, but significant segment of the tennis community.

As the group gets ready to celebrate its first year, Kansas City's tennis and LGBT communities have begun to take notice

His passion for tennis has been energized again by the group, says Jason Sportsman (far left). Aubrey Williams (left) plays in the LGBT tennis group to sharpen his game and enjoy the relaxed nature of the members. Shelley Long (below) joined the group for the first time with her friend, Dan.

through requests for radio interviews and features in local newspapers. Plans are in the works for a Web site, charity events benefitting tennis programs for inner-city youth, and the formation of an official USTA Community Tennis Association.

But at the end of the day, Sullivan's goals for the group remain simple: "to increase the number of LGBT players in Kansas City who enjoy this great sport, and to provide a fun, safe and healthy environment to do that."

While a common thread for the group is their shared identity as LGBT people, it is the tennis that binds. The love of the game knows no barriers.

"Even though there is a variety of skill levels in the group, there is a comfort zone that makes everyone feel welcome and play for their sheer enjoyment of the sport," Shelley George, USTA Missouri Valley president said. "The most amazing part of the group is the diversity it represents with tennis as the glue for bringing all of these people together."

The sun is setting on another tennis night for this group, but like most players, any night with a racquet in hand, playing with friends, is a night well spent.

And that's a love that we can all relate to. ●



For more information about the Kansas City Tennis Alliance, contact Brian Sullivan at kansascitytennis@gmail.com.

Net Notes

WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND THE MISSOURI VALLEY

Former Missouri Valley junior standout **Blake Strode** (St. Louis) was named the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Strode is majoring in international economics and Spanish at the University of Arkansas and boasts a cumulative GPA of 3.972. He was also named to the All-SEC first team for the second time.



photo courtesy of the University of Arkansas Athletics

Haley Martin (Tulsa, Okla.) recently won the ITF Hawaii doubles girls 18 event with American Ashley Dai. They defeated the No. 4 seed in the final and the No. 2 seed in the semifinal.

Three facilities in the Missouri Valley were recently named to the "Top 50 Tennis Welcome Centers of 2008" list, a distinction recognized by the Tennis Industry Association, the USTA and the trade magazine *Racquet Sports Industry*. These sites were recognized for their efforts in growing the game with their well-rounded programs to new and current players of all ages and abilities. The facilities recognized were **Cooper Tennis Complex**, Springfield, Mo.; **Midtown Tennis Club**, Overland Park, Kan. and **Shaw Park Tennis Welcome Center**, Clayton, Mo.

The International Tennis Hall of Fame and First Serve hosted a special evening in Miami in March to honor 2005 Hall of Famer **Butch Buchholz**. Formerly of St. Louis, Buchholz has played key roles in the evolution of both professional and amateur tennis. Buchholz is a 1994 inductee into the USTA Missouri Valley Hall of Fame.



Three players recently played in the ITF World Team Championship on the red clay of Mallorca, Spain. **Chris Carey** (Kansas City, Mo.) competed in the mens 35 division and the team placed 7th. **Doug Ely** (Springfield, Mo.) played for the mens 45 team and they also placed 7th. **Bill Roach** (Papillion, Neb.) played with the mens 55 team and their team placed 5th. While in Mallorca, Carey kept a blog which can be viewed on our Web site at missourivalley.usta.com.

The USTA announced that it will become a 25 percent owner of Advanta World TeamTennis Pro League. One of the main goals in the new partnership is to provide an expanded marketing platform for the USTA's Jr. Team Tennis program through the teams and players. The USTA Missouri Valley has three franchises in our section, the **Kansas City Explorers**, **Springfield Lasers** and **St. Louis Aces**.

The 2009 college tennis season is in the books and colleges and players from the Missouri Valley have had very successful 2009 campaigns. Strode was awarded the ITA/Arthur Ashe Jr. Award for Leadership and Sportsmanship and Kelcy Tefft (Enid, Okla.) was awarded the ITA National Senior Player of the Year award. For a complete listing of tournament finishes and award winners, visit us online at missourivalley.usta.com.



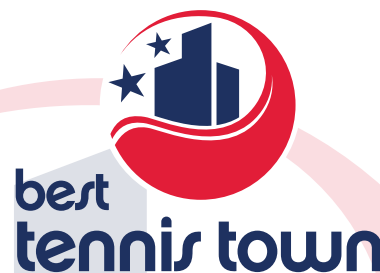
The World TeamTennis season kicks off in early July with matches all across the country and in our three franchise cities, Kansas City, Springfield and St. Louis. Multiple marquee players will be making stops for the teams including the Bryan Brothers, Anna Kournikova, Sam Querrey and Kim Clijsters. To find out when your favorite teams and players will be playing, visit WTT.com.

THINK YOUR TOWN'S GOT GAME?

The USTA is inviting every town, borough and city across the nation to compete for the **Best Tennis Town Title** and \$100,000.

The USTA wants to know how your town exemplifies the passion, excitement and spirit that tennis brings to a community. From now through July 1, 2009, town leaders can nominate their community for the 2009 Best Tennis Town contest. There is only one nomination allowed for each community, so please be sure to work with leaders in your community to create a joint entry that showcases all that your town has to offer.

Go to BestTennisTown.com for more information.



Getting to Know... Ajay Pant

Long-time volunteer and tennis enthusiast Ajay Pant (Overland Park, Kan.) has traveled the world, not in search of anything, just sharing his life's passion: tennis. When you sit down with him it is immediately evident that this man lives and breathes tennis, and bass fishing with his daughter, but tennis is first. Traveling upwards of 40,000 miles a year, he shares his passion with coaches and players across the globe, Pant found the time between coaching, traveling, and his family (wife, Megan; son, Arun; and daughter, Kiran) to sit down with **CrossCourt** to share his story.



courtesy of Ajay Pant
Bob Davis and Arthur Ashe, both friends and mentors to Ajay Pant.

How did you first get involved in tennis?

I'm 45 years old now and I've been playing since I was six years old. My dad took me out and I couldn't stand anything about the game. But within the next year, I was addicted to tennis. It quickly became my calling in life. I did try to play professionally, but I had a lack of talent which precluded me from being successful on tour. Luckily, I then got in with Nick Bollettieri down in Florida as a coach.

You went from a player to a coach, why?

Even as a player, my eye could always see things differently in people. I was going to go to medical school but it just felt like tennis is what I was supposed to do.

What is your coaching history?

I'd been working with Bollettieri since 1986 and he got me connected with Arthur Ashe and The Arthur Ashe/Nick Bollettieri "Cities" Program which I worked with until I joined the Tennis Club of America in May 1993 and have been with them ever since.

What made tennis your "calling"?

I just love tennis. The sounds. The

feel. It's the most wonderful sport ever. We have to celebrate the sport. It (tennis) can transcend life beyond the court. It can change lives. My kids are learning things now that I couldn't teach in a classroom.

You travel a lot to teach others. Why?

I travel about 40,000 miles per year. But, if I can be a small part of the coaching in this country and how we teach and deliver the sport, I owe it to the game to do this. It's something that Arthur taught me.

What is the most rewarding part of coaching?

Hands down it is that once we establish a goal, whether it be on-court or off-court focused, I take a lot of pride in making the goal become a reality. I take a lot of pride in making sure my students succeed.

What did working with Arthur Ashe teach you?

He taught me to always keep my word. Treat people like they are very important. Arthur always kept his word. He would take the high road with virtually every issue, even if it was blatantly unfair to him. He taught me the same philosophy.

Playing tennis is better than...

Anything except for time with my family. Tennis is my identity. I lose a sense of time and work when I'm coaching. For me, even playing isn't the same as coaching.

What are your favorite non-tennis activities?

Bass fishing with my daughter. It's our time. That's the one thing that truly relaxes me in every sense of the word.





Date	Event	Location Details
June 12-17	BG12-18 Segment II Super II	Cooper Tennis Complex Springfield, Mo.
June 19-22	BG10-18 Segment II Futures	Dwight Davis Tennis Center St. Louis, Mo.
	BG10-18 Segment II Sweet 16	Plaza Tennis Center Kansas City, Mo.
June 22-28	Women's \$10k Pro Circuit	Wichita State University Wichita, Kan.
June 26-29	BG10-18 Segment II Futures	Genesis Health Club Wichita, Kan.
July 10-12	USTA National Husband & Wife Hard Court Championships	Plaza Tennis Center Kansas City, Mo.
	5s & Open Adult Outdoor Championship	Oklahoma City Tennis Center Oklahoma City
July 10-13	BG10-18 Segment II Futures	Multiple Sites & Locations
July 17-20	BG10-18 Segment II Futures	Multiple Sites & Locations
	BG 14's Team Event	Riverside Wichita, Kan.
July 20-26	Men's \$10k Futures Pro Circuit	Millennium Tennis & Fitness Club Joplin, Mo.
July 27 - August 4	Men's \$10k Futures Pro Circuit	Lewis & Clark Community College Godfrey, Ill.
	Women's \$10k Pro Circuit	Noyes Tennis Center St. Joseph, Mo.
July 28-31	BG10-18 Segment II Futures	Plaza Tennis Center Kansas City, Mo.
August 1-5	BG10-18 Segment II Futures	Westwood Tennis Center Norman, Okla.
August 7-10	BG10-18 Summer Section Championships	La Fortune Tennis Center Tulsa, Okla.
August 13-16	USTA Missouri Valley League Section Championships 5.0, 4.0, 3.0 Adults; 3.5, 4.5 Seniors	Multiple Sites Oklahoma City, Okla.
August 27-30	USTA Missouri Valley League Section Championships 4.5, 3.5, 2.5 Adults; 3.0, 4.0 Seniors	Multiple Sites Oklahoma City, Okla.
August 29-September 1	Tennis Teachers Conference	Grand Hyatt Hotel New York
August 31-September 13	US Open	USTA Billie Jean King NTC Flushing Meadows, N.Y.
September 1-6	US Open USTA Wheelchair Championships	Dwight Davis Tennis Center St. Louis

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