

You know that you've had an impact in your tennis community when people decide to name a tennis court in your honor. Today, you can play a match at Broomfield Swim and Tennis Club on "The Covington Court", a living tribute to George Covington, 83, who symbolizes what recreational tennis is all about.

It's fitting that Covington will be the recipient of USTA Colorado's Clyde Rogers Award at the 11th annual Colorado Tennis Hall of Fame Gala on January 28, 2011, at the Marriott Denver Tech Center. The award is given annually for outstanding contributions to the recreational tennis players of Colorado.

"It's kind of interesting to be given an award for having so much fun doing it all these years. I spent my whole life at Broomfield Swim and Tennis Club trying to improve tennis there, and I've been teaching a lot of kids and a lot of people," said Covington, who loves teaching tennis to players of all ages. He loves it so much, he's done so without ever charging a fee. This fall, he also assisted the Broomfield High School boys tennis team.

"I also spent about 21 years in Arizona. We went down there for three months every year, and I've been teaching seniors down there, some of which have never hit a ball in their life."

Covington, whose wife, Charlotte, 78, also plays tennis two or three times a week, said he owes a lot to tennis for keeping him in such great shape for so long.

"I just quit playing competitive tennis this summer. I'd been playing 4.0 and 3.5 tennis competitively," said Covington, who has played in more than 175 USTA tournaments. "Essentially, tennis was really a plus for me in my life just from the standpoint of keeping in shape and to live long enough to be able to give back to it."

And giving back is what Covington is all about.

"I decided to give back to it a long, long time ago. I never charged for a lesson. Of course, you get what you pay for, right? That was a fun thing to do," Covington said. "As I got older, it was gratifying to be able to help people that have never hit balls before or to coach at the high school and teach the kids how to play."

Gene Wilken, 82, of Fort Collins met Covington while playing tennis on the Colorado league circuit, and the two have known one another for the past 30 or 40 years.

"We both partnered up and played against each other," said Wilken, who nominated Covington for the Clyde Rogers Award. "The man is a lot bigger than the story behind that award. This is one of these really great guys, tremendous sense of community of giving back and of helping people. He's what you think of when you think of these bigger than life people who made a big difference in the community. And it's not only Broomfield, it's the tennis community in Colorado, too."

Covington grew up in Denver and started playing tennis when he was 17.

Story by
TOM FASANO

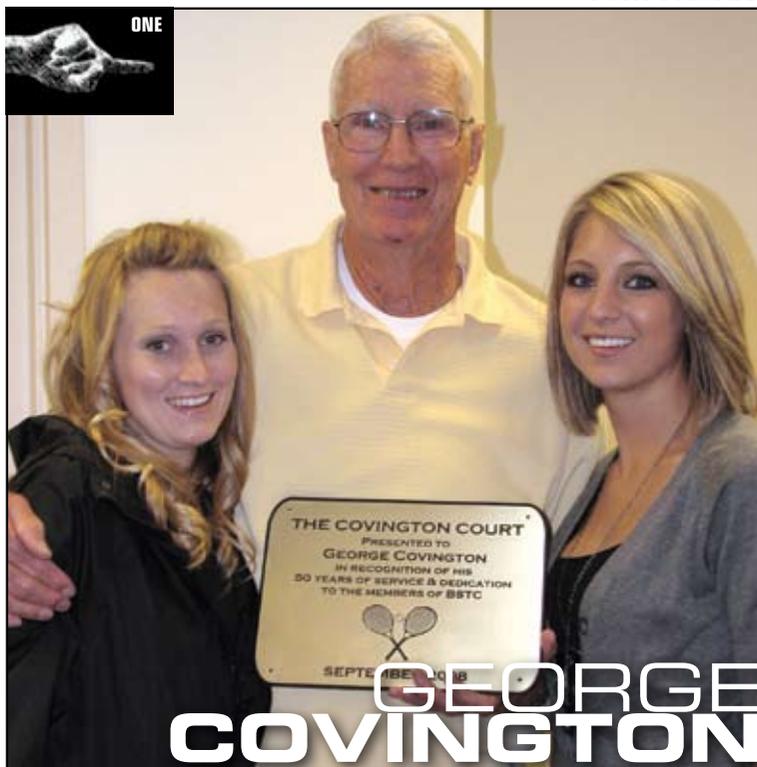


photo courtesy of George Covington



HIGH FIVE

For the past three decades, *COLORADO TENNIS* (née *High Bounce* in 1976) has been bringing you profiles of local players, coaches, administrators and anyone else in the Colorado tennis community who shares their passion for the sport with others.

In each issue, we are profiling five individuals who deserve recognition for their efforts and accomplishments. As always, some you will know, while others will be fresh names and faces.

As always, we encourage readers to help us recognize others who they think deserve special recognition. Email Kurt Desautels <kurt@coloradotennis.com> with your comments or suggestions.

Charlotte Covington said her husband has given so much of his time and effort because of his love for the game. Their four kids grew up playing tennis, too.

"He initiated the first Broomfield open tournament, and volunteered with the girls and boys tennis teams at the high school during the time we had our kids playing there and years after because he loves the game and he loves doing it," Charlotte said.

Wilken said tennis continues to be a big part of Covington's life.

"It's not just now and then and once in a while, it's continuous," Wilken said. "He is constantly putting a lot of energy and a lot of his time into the game. He's sort of been Mr. Tennis around Broomfield. How many people have courts named after them? He practically single-handedly developed the program there, and he's still doing it out there on the courts teaching the young people for free."

Wilken said Covington has rock-solid values who is willing to put in the time and energy.

"He's one of those guys who sees himself as a moving force and devotes it to this game that he loves so much," Wilken said. 

more HIGHFIVES, next page 



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HIGH FIVE

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Chris Weyer caught the tennis bug early in her life. As a child, she would go watch her mom play tennis on the courts at Arvada Tennis Center, then go home and fill her house with the reverberating "bang, bang" of a tennis ball methodically hitting her garage. For her, it's a joyous sound, made all the more special these days because it is her 10 year-old son, Conor, doing the hitting.

"For him, we made a tennis wall *inside* the garage," Chris laughs.

Chris played junior varsity tennis for Arvada West High School, but it wasn't until recently that Chris jumped head first into tennis again.

"I wanted to find something that I could do while committing to my full time job, *motherhood!*"

Today, Chris plays leagues, tournaments, and teaches tennis at the Arvada Tennis Center whenever she can. She's also on a mission to bring tennis to young people.

"Just being able to expose kids to tennis is a wonderful experience. They really don't even need a court. Sometimes just getting a racquet and a ball in their hands can get them going," she explained.

Chris takes advantage of any opportunity to expose kids to tennis, from being involved in any number of special events at area tennis clubs to introducing tennis to the after-school program at a local elementary school in Arvada.

Always seeking more ways to bring tennis to the community and giving back to tennis, Chris answered an advertisement seeking volunteers for the Racquets for All (RFA) program. Immediately she knew it was a great fit for her.

Racquets for All was started in 2008, but really hit its stride in 2009. The program recycles used tennis equipment of all types and gets it into the eager hands of those who need it. With a dozen or so volunteers on board, the program is growing. Unlike many other programs, however, RFA is completely run by volunteers. Because of this, finding the right volunteers is critical.

Kristy Harris, Community Development Director for USTA Colorado is proud of Chris' commitment and drive.

"Chris is the type of person who when she gets involved, she GETS involved. She recognizes where opportunities are to expose RFA. She's serious about the success of the program, because she knows what the program can do and will do for players."

Kristy said that commitment like Chris' is crucial, and she can't even begin to work with a facility without knowing there's a strong volunteer in place and a succession plan for that volunteer.

Chris has already been able to make a difference for many kids who would not have had the chance to pick up a racquet and we are extremely grateful for her dedication.

If you have a racquet or other equipment that you are not using, consider donating it to the RFA program. Also, if you think you might want to be a volunteer for your area, please email crfa@coloradotennis.com. ☺



photo courtesy of Chris Weyer

Story by

KATIE NEWELL

Even though Monica Li is one of the best tennis players in Colorado for her age group, that kind of recognition doesn't define her. At 16, Monica is much more than a great tennis player.

She's one of the top students at Fairview High School with a 4.7 grade-point average in advance-placement classes in the school's International Baccalaureate program. While her high school coach, Susan Stensrud, says Monica is easily a future Division I tennis player, Monica said it's her academics that will be the top priority when selecting a college.

Another priority for Monica is making sure her actions on the tennis court are at a high standard. Monica, a junior at Fairview and a member of the National Forensic League and National Honor Society, is not only a great tennis player, but the way she conducts herself when playing tennis has made others take notice.

Monica will be the recipient of USTA Colorado's Phyllis Lockwood Award at the 11th annual Colorado Tennis Hall of Fame Gala on January 28, 2011, at the Marriott Denver Tech Center. The award is given annually for girls sportsmanship in the 15 to 18-year-old age group.

Being nice and respectful to everyone on and off the court are important to Monica.

"It's a great honor to receive this award," the 5-foot-5-inch Monica said. "On the court, you have to act your part. Tantrums are not allowed. If we have a scoring dispute, I'll settle it in an orderly manner."

Stensrud said Monica is deserving of the honor.

"If you are in control of your emotions, you're in control of your game. I think it goes hand in hand. Monica really is a standout," Stensrud said. "She's always composed. She's always thoughtful. She's always really thinking about how she's playing. She's great about calling scores. She's always polite to her opponents, but she always has a certain steely resolve underneath it all. She likes to win, but winning or losing is not everything. I think she just likes to play well to have a good match."

Monica, her father, Xinlin, and her mother, Jinfang, as well as her 14-year-old sister, Katie, have a family USTA membership. The tennis family loves to

get out on the courts, and are members of the Millennium Harvest House in Boulder.

"Our whole family plays," Xinlin said. "When we go on vacation, we specifically look for a resort with tennis courts so we can have fun and play tennis always together."

Xinlin played table tennis before taking up tennis in the US about five years ago. He plays at the 4.5 level in USTA leagues and is ranked No. 2 in the state.

Winning the Phyllis Lockwood Award is a big honor for his daughter, said Xinlin.

"I feel glad she is being recognized. On the court, she has a very good attitude like real good sportsmanship when she plays tournaments," Xinlin said. "We talk about this at the dinner table that good sportsmanship is definitely good and don't get frustrated."



photo courtesy of the Li Family

Story by **TOM FASANO**

Monica started playing Colorado Association of Recreational Athletics (CARA) tennis at the age of 10, and she played in her first open tournament when she was 12. She qualified for state at 5A as a freshman in No. 1 singles and lost in the first round. This past spring, she finished fourth in the Class 5A girls state tennis tournament, and is the top returner in the state at No. 1 singles in 5A. The three girls who finished ahead of her at state were seniors. She also placed sixth at the Intermountain Summer Sectional (G16s).

Stensrud, who has been coaching in Colorado since 1988, said Monica is extraordinary in everything she does.

"She has an exceptional game. It's very well rounded. She doesn't really have any weaknesses," Stensrud said. "She's a great baseliner, but she can easily come into the net. She's very quick. She's very strong, and when she plays somebody tough, her game improves. She's a real gamer." ☺

Rikk Shimizu is a 17-year old junior tennis player, but his path to tennis and his commitment to the sport are anything but typical. Rikk started tennis like many other juniors – his parents played and he took lessons when he was younger. But, early on, Rikk chose swimming over tennis. He had great success, going to the Colorado High School State swimming championships three straight years. As recently as 2009, Rikk attended a swim camp in Florida with a former Olympic coach. And, that's where Rikk's commitment to tennis really began.

Rikk spent his last morning in Florida watching the epic Wimbledon final between Roger Federer and Andy Roddick. The intensity of the match and the mental toughness displayed by both players resonated with Rikk. He said, "The match had me glued to the television thinking, could I do this? I realized how much I wanted to go for something great and it seemed clear that I should try another sport and work toward something. It had been so long since I played tennis, but it was the sport that I wanted to go for."

Rikk certainly has gone for it over the past year. He played doubles for Legacy High School, went to Regionals and placed fourth. This summer, he played six tournaments and went to the Junior Team Tennis Colorado District Championships.

One of the greatest things about Rikk's determination and spirit for tennis are that they extend beyond the court. Rikk has become a valuable volunteer for USTA Colorado, helping at the Black Arts Festival and with the Colorado Youth Tennis Foundation online auction and Hall of Fame Gala. Lisa Schaefer, Colorado Youth Tennis Foundation Director, has worked with Rikk and says, "It is refreshing to interact with a young person who sees the importance of volunteering – of giving back to the community. We are fortunate to have Rikk on our team."



photo courtesy of the Shimizu family

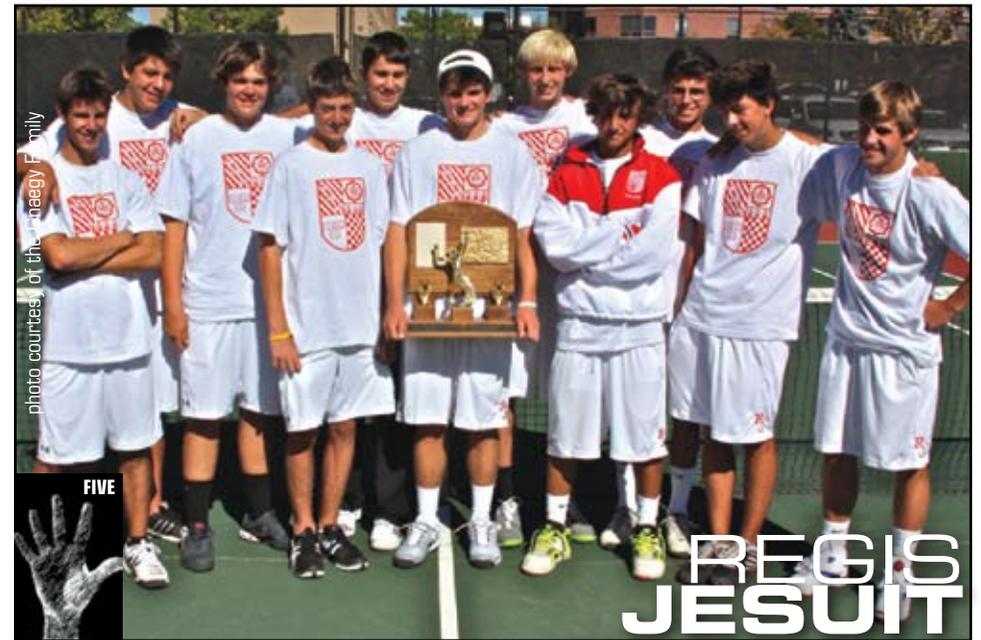
Story by
RACHEL MORLEY

Rikk also volunteered with young players at North Jeffco as well as at the Colorado Athletic Club Monaco adult tournament. Rikk says, "I felt that if I wanted to be a great tennis player, it would be best for me to sit in other's shoes. I decided I would give back to the game of tennis while being part of tennis."

His commitment to tennis is recognized and applauded by many in the tennis community. He was nominated for the 2010 USTA Colorado Mike, Gene & Maurice Reidy Award, which recognizes those who exemplify sportsmanship, leadership and achievement on and off the court.

Currently, Rikk is home schooled and spends his free time improving his tennis game as well as the tennis experience for others. "I plan to take a risk playing open tournaments. I'm 17 and I have nothing to lose and tons to gain," says Rikk. This positive attitude gives Rikk a true perspective of the importance of tennis. He says, "If I manage to stay healthy, tennis is for life. If I make a college tennis team, it will be a stepping stone to hopefully making it big in tennis, but if not, tennis is still for life. I see playing tournaments for the rest of my life. Volunteering will always be part of my life – I have been blessed and giving back is not hard." 🎾

Cherry Creek High School has virtually written the book on winning boys' high school tennis championships, claiming 36 of the past 38 team titles. Last year, Regis Jesuit High School lost the crown to Cherry Creek by the narrowest of margins (three points). With most of the Regis team returning, they did not forget about it during the off-season.



HAIL TO THE CHAMPIONS: Ricky Drexelius, David Klippel, Jacob Spreyer, Zach Fryer, Matt Colapinto (co-captain), Colin Haas (with trophy), Garrett Cochran, Alex Gnaegy (co-captain), Tyler Brasel, Mark Miller, Dylan Gust

Story by **LINDA WEGNER**

This year, Regis tore a page out of Creek's playbook to write their own bit of tennis history, scoring points at every position and upending the perennial favorites to take the school's first tennis title since 2000. It was, as everyone on the squad will attest, a team victory.

"The brotherhood we have at Regis transfers to the tennis court too. The whole school was amped-up about it. We were all determined, knew what we had to do and were excited to do it," shares co-captain and senior Alex Gnaegy.

On the morning of the first day of tournament play this year, Head Coach Laura Jones, in her first year as the Regis head coach, said, "The boys came out focused, had a good warm up and got loose. They were ready to play hard."

By the end of that day, all seven positions – three singles and four doubles – had a Regis representation in the semi-finals brackets. This helped to secure a significant lead and some breathing room.

Coach Jones recalls, "We all felt relief that we were doing what we had planned to do and that was nice."

This is quite a seasoned team, with eight seniors, most of the players had individual championship titles from previous seasons, and as a team they have been ever-so-close to a team championship, but never have they been able to find their way to holding the coveted championship trophy. Now, they were poised to realize their team dream.

All but one position secured a spot in the finals. To advance this way, as a team, was moving for Coach Jones, "I watched with pride. These boys, who had remained on their mission all season long, were finally attaining their dream together."

Individual state championship titles went to Colin Haas at No. 2 singles, Jacob Spreyer at No. 3 singles, Matt Colapinto and Zach Freyer at No. 2 doubles, Rick Drexelius and David Klippel at No. 4 doubles. Second place designations went to Mark Miller at No. 1 singles and Alex Gnaegy and Dylan Gust at No. 1 doubles. A third place trophy went to Tyler Brasel and Garrett Cochran, the No. 3 doubles team. Each position adding points to the team's total of 86 points, far out-scoring Boulder High School with 43 and Cherry Creek with 38. The victory was truly a team championship and the culmination of perseverance, experience and brotherhood playing out with dignity and heart.

Next year the team must rebuild. Eight of the eleven players will graduate this spring. The boys who remain behind will have this experience to help lead the new players. Coach Jones believes they are up for the challenge.

"I look forward to rebuilding. The graduating players will leave a legacy of hard work and the players who remain have developed some good leadership skills from this experience," expressed Coach Jones. "Next year we'll have some foundation to build from. This year I was along for the ride."

And what a ride it was – crossing the finish line with four individual titles and the school's second-ever team state championship title that will go down in history as a most impressive and dominating win. 🎾