

TENNIS

Recently, I attended a workshop held at Morehead Memorial Hospital regarding the heart. During the workshop the material covered the importance of participating in daily physical activity to: improve cholesterol levels; lower body mass index (especially if you are overweight); improve blood pressure control; and improve fasting blood sugar levels (especially if you are a diabetic). It was brought out in the meeting that we should participate in 150 minutes of moderate physical exercise; or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise each week to improve length and quality of life.

I felt better while I lived in Colorado and worked full time; before I turned age 55, because my weight was under control and I had no health problems. I was physically active and I participated in daily exercise. I was involved in several activities involving home, work, church and the community. I returned home, to Reidsville, when Mother was dying of cancer, in 2001 and began working in group homes. This job required little to no physical activity, in fact, I did little more than just sat. I slowly found myself a hundred pounds overweight and the doctor stated I was a diabetic. I made only excuses for gaining weight and for my failure to continue my involvements in exercise programs to lose weight. I developed arthritis throughout my body due to falling several different times, the worst being a fall of stairs that I fell down, bruising my whole body, and being a victim in several different automobile accidents. The doctors explained to me the necessity of daily exercise. I began walking a mile a day. I have found that exercise does loosen up my joints and help keep them from getting so stiff and painful. I retired at the age of 62, and moved into the Hidden Valley Apartments. I began going to a Senior Center, called Garden of Eden, located in a part of Eden known as Spray.

While at the Garden of Eden I met Shelby Rhyne, Executive Director of Rockingham County Tennis Association. She asked the group of individuals present at the Center if anyone would be interested in volunteering. She was looking for volunteer coaches to help her teach children to play tennis. I raised my hand and did volunteer. I had no idea what was expected of a kid's tennis coach, as I had never played tennis in my life. Tennis was just as new to me as it was to the children. I knew that I needed to first accomplish learning some skills; before I could successfully coach the children. I remember feeling embarrassed that the children picked up on the game a lot quicker than I did. Due to lack of tennis **shabby** I found it difficult to believe that the kids would recognize me as their coach. In fact, I can remember swallowing a lot of mixed emotions, mostly due to a lack of understanding the game, and what my job entailed as a volunteer. I was hungry for recognition of my achievements, no matter how small, and wanted my achievements recognized by becoming overzealous with the completion of setting up the nets, putting out the balls and baskets and giving out the rackets, making out the name tags for the children and giving out the stickers and fliers after the game; because I thought this was expected of me. I even made a point to be in the children's pictures, because I wanted to be recognized and feel that I fitted in the game.

As I said, I had absolutely no knowledge of tennis, and as a volunteer I was starting at ground zero. It makes me understand better what my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ meant when He said, "you must become as a small child to enter into Heaven". I believe you first must experience firsthand what the children experience when they are first introduced to playing tennis; before you can be successful at working with them. Only when you see through their eyes can you relate to them, and feel more at ease working with them.

I want to recognize Shelby Rhyne as she is a great example of a coach. She picked up on my lack of self-confidence and guided me by using teaching tools that reshaped my thinking,

and the way I related with the kids. She never displayed impatience with me; while providing me with simple instructions, to train me one step at a time, to relate with the kids, in a relaxed and non-threatening manner. As I learned to relate with the children, and gained in self-confidence, she continued to give me more responsibilities to broaden my scope of the game. Children are people too; just young people, who are easily impressionable, and can easily have their feelings hurt, and their egos bruised.

Volunteer kid's coaches are team leaders, and most importantly, mentors, as we are role models for the children we coach. Thus, it is important that we are positive examples for the children to imitate. We need to always keep in mind the importance of saying, "thank you" and "please" to whomsoever we talk to. The Proverb: "to have friends you must first show yourself friendly" describes working with children successfully. Kids are hungry for love and attention, and they need to be needed, and they love to please adults. They learn by doing; and adults do well to provide kids with opportunities to be around them and help them. As a volunteer, I am learning the important of assigning small tasks for the kids to do, to make them feel needed and helpful. The children enjoy helping to set up the nets to play the game, and take them down after the game. They enjoy placing the balls in the baskets for the game and gather up the balls after the game. They enjoy making out name tags for the kids in the group, and handing out the fliers and stickers. They enjoy being score keepers and counting (15,30,40, duce and al). They are eager to help put away all of the equipment after the game. By helping they learn to play tennis on their own and are encouraged to do so. Children learn to relate with each other appropriately when they have positive role models to look up to. We need adults to volunteer to become kid's coaches to build positive relationships with these children who come from various economic levels throughout Rockingham County.

Kids learn to trust us to care for them as individuals. I believe children who feel comfortable helping are much more relaxed playing tennis. Again, it's not necessary for the volunteer to have a prior knowledge of playing the game, it is necessary for the volunteer to enjoy working with children. As a volunteer we explain and demonstrate different skills, and observe, listen and praise the children as they practice their skills. We never express failure for every child is a winner, and moves ahead at his/her own level in tennis. As a volunteer, we get excited as we observe each individual child reach a higher level of performance. It is all about the children and making tennis a fun game for them. We encourage the children to practice the game on their own and with their friends. We encourage the children to participate in setting up and taking down the equipment so that they are able to do this for themselves. We encourage good sportsmanship, and being a good team player. We teach by our words and actions. We listen to the youth and show them they are important to us as individuals. We donate our time faithfully by showing up to work with the children at scheduled times so that the children know we care and are there for them. We build relationships with the children by listening to them and being fair. We seek to help them become achievers, while praising their efforts as they break free of whatever barriers that may be holding them back; such as being shy or timid. We are patient with children who may be easily provoked; or become angry when they can't perform the way they want to. We remind the children of the rules of playing tennis and the importance of being good sports and team players. We teach kids how to keep score and provide opportunities for them to perform on a challenging level.

Teaching children to play tennis as a volunteer is very rewarding. I encourage anyone that has the time to spare to volunteer. Especially the retired, I am challenging you to make time for today's youth. I am sixty-eight and I am so happy that I chose to be a volunteer tennis

coach. Working with children keeps me from setting at home being inactive. I am more focused. I have a lot more energy. Volunteering gives me something worthwhile to look forward to. The benefits are great. It gets me out of my home meeting new people, and keeps me from being lonely and depressed. Working with the youth keeps me active and helps me mature gracefully. Won't you get in the game today? Lets' all play tennis.