

TENNIS TALK July 2015
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TITLE: A tennis ball and the Eiffel Tower

What do a tennis ball and the Eiffel Tower have in common? For two weeks in late May and early June, each year a VERY LARGE tennis ball hangs from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. It's time for the French Open, one of 4 major tennis tournaments around the world that make up the GRAND SLAM of professional tennis.

A message from a college friend dropped into my email box in February. "I'm going to be in Paris for a week at the end of May, can you come?" It had been 40 years since we met there as part of a college year abroad program. After a brief moment to consult to see if my credit card bonus travel miles would take me there, I replied "YES". Only when I made a call to NC Tennis in mid-May and Andrew Waldrop asked, "Are you going to the French Open?" did I realize that it would be the first week of matches at Roland Garros, the home of the French Open.

Fast forward through figuring out how to purchase the tournament grounds passes online (No tickets are sold at the gate.) and the call to the credit card company who put my card on hold because they thought someone in France had stolen my number – I found myself in Paris.

I loved discovering my friend's neighborhood, the 4th arrondissement - Hotel de Ville. The Place des Voges is as beautiful as it was when we first toured there 40 years ago but is now surrounded by fashionable art galleries and full of neighborhood families and students playing, picnicking, and relaxing. The Jewish Quarter not only has the best falafel shop and Jewish bakeries in Paris, but fashion shops and a shoe store on every corner. The #1 metro goes from her apartment near Rue Saint Paul directly up the Champs Elysee. The 27 bus takes us along the quai to two small decorative arts museums in the 8th near Parc Monceau and the 43 still takes me to Neuilly-sur-Seine where my first French family, the Perronets - lived in 1975. The River Seine is full of tourist-laden bateaux mouches taking in the sites of this centuries old city; and you still stand in line to get in the popular Musee d'Orsay to see impressionist paintings hanging in a railroad station. Granted, It is a VERY BIG railroad station.

After 6 days of exploring Paris together, Thursday finally arrived and we rode the metro 45 minutes to the Bois de Boulogne, a 2000 acres park on the outskirts of Paris. We hopped right into a small Peugeot mini-van that whisked us and another French family – for FREE – to the gates of the tournament venue - Internationaux de France de Tennis, Roland Garros.

Tickets and passports presented, we walked onto the grounds for Day 5 of the tournament at 10am to find it full of activity. 100 ball girls and boys were warming up stretching together to music – like a large dance troupe. Three practice courts were full of players hitting on the “dirt” – red clay courts - before the matches began. Children were playing on mini-courts with foam balls in the Fun Zone. Friendly hosts and hostesses were dressed in retro attire – navy blazers and white pants for the gentleman ushers, drop waist white pleated dresses with matching sweaters and a chic cloche (hat) for the ladies. Roland Garros white panama fedoras with navy bands were everywhere.

Our theme of the day was to follow “les Americaines” (the American women). There were 3 playing on the outside courts that day. There are 17 outside courts and 4 stadium courts at Roland Garros. Our tickets don't admit us to Suzanne Lenglen stadium court where Serena would play.

We started on court 5 with Irina Falconi (winner in 3 sets over Bulgarian Sesi Karatantcheva). We moved to court 7 where we could watch the match on the court in front of us and stand-up to see two more courts behind. After a 3-hour 5-set match between two young Aussies (Kokkinakis and Tomic), we saw Sloane Stevens and Madison Keys win in straight sets against Belinda Benic from Switzerland and Heather Watson of Great Britain. It was after 5pm and we were expecting guests for dinner. Time to find the gate, our mini-van chauffeur and back to the metro.

It was a wonderful day in the sun, in the park, beside the courts. Au revoir Roland Garros and Paris...until we meet again.

Have FUN, Make new FRIENDS, and Get Fit play more tennis Rockingham County.



Rockingham County Tennis Association (RC Tennis), formed in 2014, is an organized group of dedicated volunteers and professionals who come together to provide programs and events to promote the growth of tennis in Rockingham County.

For more information about tennis for all ages in Rockingham County, go to our webpage at www.rockingham.usta.com and follow us on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/RCYouthtennis.