

“A Brief History of Tennis Courts in Grand Marais.”

By Gene Glader

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If you stopped by the five tennis courts located by the school during May you would have seen them busy with students learning to play tennis. During the mornings and afternoons the courts were busy with students learning to play tennis as part of the school physical education program and after school other kids were participating in an instructional program sponsored by the Cook County Tennis Association. In addition, you would have found many adults playing tennis around noon hour and in the late afternoons and on weekends.

Seeing this significant level of participation in tennis today in Grand Marais points out how interest in tennis has grown in the county from very humble beginnings. The first reference to a tennis court being built in Grand Marais was the following in 1906.

“A tennis court is being prepared and fitted up on the old Mayhew garden spot, south of D. B. McAlpine's residence, and this interesting game promises to become the popular sport in Grand Marais this season. There are quite a number here now who play the game and there are others who are willing to be initiated.”¹ No further reference to these courts was found.

The next known reference to tennis courts in Grand Marais related to the construction of two courts in 1938 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. The court were located where the addition on the north side of the court house stands.² The surface of the courts was black top and heavy posts were installed to hold the wire backstops and the nets. The fee for using the courts was \$2.00 for an individual seasonal membership and \$3.00 for a family seasonal membership or \$.10 per set, for each individual for non-member play.³

In the early summer of 1939 another coat of tar was added to the court surface. The fee for play on the courts in 1939 was reduce to \$1.50 for an individual season ticket and \$2.50 for a family ticket. Rackets could be rented for \$.05 per hour and non-season ticket holder could play for \$.10 per hour. In 1939 tennis was included in the summer playground program and a tennis tournament was included in the Fishermen's Picnic schedule of events.⁴

In 1952 the east court was rebuilt with a high wire fence at both ends of the court. An article in the Cook County News Herald described the project as follows: “Through joint efforts of the County Engineer's office and the school, one tennis court has been made ready north of the county court house. Boys from the high school, assisted by local school janitors, have painted lines and put up new wire netting on the east court. Netting was provided by the summer recreation program. Jack Nelson states that the court is available to interested persons at any time and will also be used in conjunction with the summer program. Persons wishing to

borrow the program's net and racquets should see or call Mr. Nelson.”⁵



Photo of two Grand Marais Tennis Courts in 1938. There was a fine wire mesh net between the two tall posts at the base of each court that is not visible in the photo, but can be seen in a digitally enhanced photo. The posts for the fencing on the north side and west end are not visible in the photo. It should also be noted that (1) there was no fence on the sides of the courts and (2) the fence separating the two courts appears to be quite close to the baselines of the courts. Photo by Milford Humphrey, courtesy of the Cook County Historical Society.

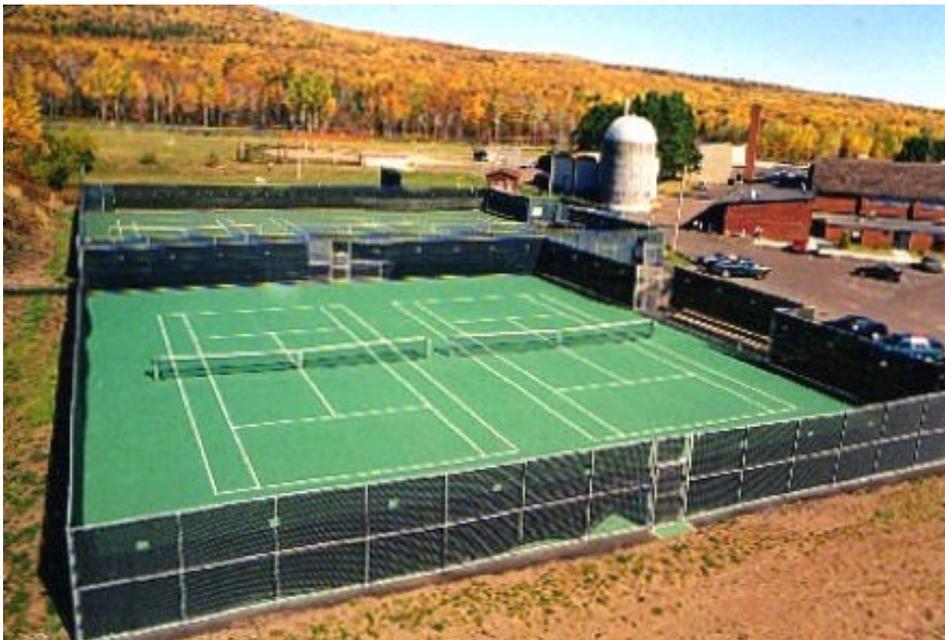
The surface of the rebuilt court was asphalt. Unfortunately, the fence was located to close to the baseline for contemporary tennis. This factor undoubtedly minimized the use of the courts by better players during the sixties and seventies.

We know that the east and west court continued in used at least until 1958 because of a reference in the local newspaper about them being used during the summer recreation program. In 1959 or during the early 60's the west court was converted to an area for basketball with the installation of a basketball hoop and backboard. In late 1969 the remaining tennis court north of the Court House was renovated again with a bid of \$2,389.00 by Richard Humphrey.

In June 1975 the District 166 School Board approved a bid by Edwin E. Thoreson, Inc. for \$24,775.75 to build three new courts by the school. According to Darold Rosbacka, who was athletic director at the school in 1975, the contract called for only a minimum of excavation and hauling in of drainage and foundational materials. Consequently, the courts soon developed cracks.

In 1992 the Cook County Tennis Association was formed with twelve members. At about the same time the county, city and school district officials decided to redo the three tennis courts on the school grounds. In April 1993, the bid for constructing the courts was given to Saginaw Construction, Inc. of Saginaw, Minnesota. In the June 1993 CCTA Newsletter it was announced that the estimated cost of constructing the three courts would be about \$65,000 with the cost evenly divided between the county, city and school district and the encouragement and assistance of the Cook County Tennis Association. Following the reconstruction of the courts John Muus began including tennis as part of the school physical education curriculum in the spring of 1994 and added tennis instruction for youth as a summer CCTA program the same year. In 1995 the CCTA added instructional classes for adults during the summer. Between 1995 and 1997 the CCTA, with the help of recreational grants from the county, built a viewing area for the courts, a backboard and brought water and electricity to the courts. The final cost for reconstructing the three courts with the viewing stand, backboard practice area and water and electricity was over \$81,000.00

With new and improved facilities the number of participants in the tennis instructional program grew rapidly. By 1996 the CCTA decided that more courts were needed and began working to find funds to build two additional courts south of the original three. The CCTA, under the fundraising leadership of Frankie Jarchow, soon raised \$67,000.00 from members, businesses, grants, and contributions from the city and county and built the two new courts in 1999. In 2007 the tennis association (CCTA) had about 65 members and provided a wide variety of programs and tournaments for interested people.



The Five Grand Marais Tennis Courts circa 2003

Starting in about year 2000 John Muus, Rod Wannebo and Gene Glader represented the CCTA on a Community Center Revitalization Committee that was working on a comprehensive plan for current and long range recreational and educational use of approximately 52 acres of county and school district land surrounding the school and

community center. The CCTA representatives worked to preserve the space for the current courts and advocated for space for additional courts. At the time the land on which the five courts were located was owned by school district 166. The Community Center Revitalization Committee made a number of recommendations to the county commissioners, school board and city council regarding the use and ownership of the land and the need for recreational facilities.

During this same period, in about 2005 the CCTA board began to see the need for resurfacing the original three courts and improving the complex. In 2006 the CCTA board began working on a plan to reconstruct the original three courts with lights, build a new practice backboard, build a roof over the viewing stand and build a storage shed for supplies and instructional equipment. At the same time efforts to raise funds for the project began. In about 2007 a design firm named Short Elliott Hendrickson, Inc. was hired to help with the details. While the planning and fund raising for the north three court complex was taking place, in 2008 the south two courts were resurfaced at a cost of \$11,800 from the Cook County recreational fund.

In 2008 there were 97 members, including 63 families in the association. In 2009 there were 94 members, including 56 families and in 2010 there were 107 individual members, including about 60 families.

It soon became clear that projected costs would be about \$250,000 for the reconstructing the north three courts with lights and the improvement listed in the above paragraph. After considerable effort by members of the CCTA board the funding for the project was achieved. The contributors to the project were as follows: Cook County allocated \$74,000, The Iron Range Rehabilitation Board (IRRB) - \$50,000, United States Tennis Association - \$44,800, United States Tennis Association/Northern Section - \$16,000, The Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation - \$15,000, the City of Grand Marais - \$7,500, and the local Lions Club - \$1,000. Members, friends and local businesses gave various amount between \$25.00 and \$4,999.00 totally about \$30,000. In addition, members contributed many, many hours of labor in helping with the project, especially the construction of the roof over the bleachers and the shed. Greg Chalmers designed the storage building and with the help of Jeff Kern and others constructed the building. Regarding the roof over the bleachers, Jeff Kern deserves credit for the design of the roof and for supervising the construction of the roof. One estimate of the value of all the volunteer work was \$14,000. Construction began on the courts on July 13, 2009 and was completed on September 10, 2009.⁶ The reconstruction of the courts involved removing the court surface to a depth of around two feet, and putting in drain tiles and new material, and then asphalt and a new top surface. The project also included putting up new posts and fence around the courts.

In 2009 the land for the courts was officially transferred to the county. This made it possible for the county and city to financially help fund the tennis facilities and for the CCTA to raise funds for the tennis complex from other sources. At about this time the

school transferred ownership of the south part of the high school building to the county. This included the gymnasium, the band room, and some offices and locker rooms. Most of the area was remodeled and a swimming pool was added by the county a financial agreement with the city council and school board. The space soon became the home of the a YMCA branch of the Duluth YMCA, but the property remains owned by the county. During the remodeling of the old gymnasium in the school CCTA members on the Community Center revitalization Committee worked hard to have the gymnasium space in the YMCA be large enough for a tennis court with an all-purpose floor surface, but the additional cost for this space forced the committee to reject the request. The YMCA building open in January 2012. However, many tennis players in the county have switched to playing pickleball in the winter in the new gymnasium.

A year later in October 2010, the need to reconstruct the south two courts became obvious. Again, the CCTA board engaged in considerable research and discussion regarding the best type of foundation and surface for the courts and the cost and potential sources of revenue. Fortunately, in 2007 the county had approved a 1% sales tax for recreational facilities and remodeling the library and other needs such as a highspeed internet service to homes and business.⁷

After working on the project for about five years, the project was approved by the County CCTA board and the County Commissions in late 2015. On February 5, 2016, a contract was signed with Dermco-LaVine Construction Company to reconstruct the two south courts with a Nova-ProBounce surface. The project involved removing several feet of dirt and laying drain tiles and covering them with new material, topped with asphalt covered with the Nova-ProBounce surface. It also included a new fence for the south end of the courts and around the viewing stand.

The bid for the project was \$133,300. \$60,000 came from the 1% tax fund, \$24,300 from the county, \$17,000 from the city, \$10,000 from the USTA Northern Section \$10,000, \$10,000 from the Cook County Tennis Association (CCTA), \$5,000 from the United States Tennis Association and \$5,000 from the Lloyd K. Johnson Association. Fred Kolkmann was hired to supervise the construction. The project was completed during the summer of 2016.

CCTA board members deserve a lot of credit for all the court complex improvements that have happened since 1993. Rod Wannebo, who has been a board member since 1992 when the association was founded, deserves special recognition for his involvement and leadership in all the court projects. It is also important to recognize that many association members have volunteered many hours of labor on various projects.

The association, town and county now have the best tennis complex on the North Shore. It will continue to need ongoing maintenance and improvements as more

locals and tourist play tennis. For example, the CCTA is currently working on plans to enlarge the storage building, build a roof over the viewing stands on the south court and improve the practice hitting wall and deal with some surface cracks on the north courts.



Tennis Court Complex. *Fall 2010*

¹ "Topics of the Week," *Cook County Herald*, May 19, 1906, p. 3.

² "Two Tennis Courts Assured for Village," *Cook County News-Herald*, April 14, 1938, p. 1.

³ "Plans Go Forward For Tennis Courts," *Cook County News-Herald*, May 19, 1938, p. 1.

⁴ “Tennis Courts to be improved,” *Cook County News-Herald*, May 4, 1939, p. 1.

⁵ “Tennis Courts Ready,” *Cook County News-Herald*, May 22, 1952, p. 1.

⁶ CCTA Annual Meeting Program, September 3, 2009.

⁷ CCTA Newsletter, Vol. 5, Issue 2, April 2007, p. 1.