

CLASS ACTION

The USTA Tennis On Campus program is bringing thousands of college students to the courts—and tennis isn't the only lesson they're learning.

by Kristen Daley



IT'S A CHANCE FOR STUDENTS TO STEP AWAY FROM their books and computers, get some fresh air, team up with friends and lose themselves in the heat of competition.

The USTA's Tennis On Campus program brings all of those benefits to nearly 500 colleges across the U.S., and that number is growing every day. Coed team play opportunities for campus community members are available through club tennis teams and intramural programs, with tennis clubs offering team practices, travel opportunities, intercollegiate play and a social outlet for its members. Intramural tennis on campuses typically include a tournament in the fall or spring.

The Tennis On Campus program was created to retain high school and junior tennis players who might not have the chance to play varsity tennis in college. With 330,000 high school tennis players and only 20,000 varsity college spots available, there is a huge void in available tennis opportunities for those who don't make the varsity team. "The Tennis On Campus program fills this void," says Glenn Arrington, USTA national manager of Collegiate Tennis. "We simply want to keep our core customers playing through college, while adding new players at the same time." Currently, more than 30,000 players are involved in the Tennis On Campus program.

Like varsity teams, club teams have a reason to stay on top of their game. Campus championships currently are held in 16 USTA sections, and they lead to a chance to play in the USTA National Campus Championship. This year's national event, held April 17-19 in Cary, N.C., featured 550 players from 64 colleges and universities. Also on hand was tennis legend Billie Jean King, whose World TeamTennis organization provides the coed format for all USTA Campus Championship events.

CLUBTENNISPHOTOS.COM (3)

“The event has served as a tremendous connector,” says Arington. “Teams from around the country come to meet, build relationships, swap ideas and, above all, have fun. The teams see this event as the culmination of their Tennis On Campus season.”

Championship title or not, Tennis On Campus players, like Andy Rebhun and Marney Babbitt, are winners every season, forming lasting bonds and developing tennis and leadership skills that will benefit them both on and off the court.

Andy Rebhun

University of Wisconsin-Madison

THE ADRENALINE RUSH WAS INCREDIBLE. WITH HIS TEAMMATES in the crowd, cheering and shouting for him, Andy Rebhun achieved one of his life goals: to stand on “The Price is Right” stage as a contestant. Of course, Rebhun, 21, of Calabasas, Calif., never thought his opportunity would come through his club tennis team.

Rebhun played tennis through middle and high school, training for six years under Sam Querrey’s current coach, Grant Doyle. When he learned that University of Wisconsin-Madison’s varsity team wasn’t taking walk-ons, he and other interested students started a club team. Fliers and other advertising attracted about 30 students that first year. “Andy went at the task with so much enthusiasm that it was contagious,” says Steve Wise, collegiate coordinator for the USTA Midwest Section.

“It’s amazing the amount of support we received from Steve and the rest of the USTA,” says Rebhun, a senior, who recently won the NIRSA/USTA National Student Tennis Ace Award, which recognizes college students who play a leadership role in promoting, organizing and/or supporting recreational tennis participation on campus.

In its second season the club tennis team grew to 140 players, and this season membership hit 200. The club team consists of a travel team and a recreational team. The 40-player travel team practices twice a week. “It’s a little more intense,” says Rebhun. “They played at the high level at USTA events in juniors. We have a great amount of talent and energy.”

And, apparently, good fortune. In an effort to expand their base of competition outside the local area, Rebhun and his teammates set out for California, where they played against area universities and did a little sight-seeing on the side. That included a trip to “The Price is Right,” where Rebhun got more than the thrill of a lifetime. He also won a car.

Off the court, Rebhun and his team have bonded through community service work and travel. The team’s California trip included matches against club teams from UCLA, UC-Irvine and Cal Poly, and a trip to Louisiana during Mardi Gras included matches against

LSU and Tulane teams. Moreover, while recreational team members, which typically number more than 100, usually play matches only against each other, the Wisconsin-Madison team is planning road trips to play other teams in Chicago and Milwaukee.

Inspired by their “amazing” experience at the USTA National Campus Championships in Austin, Texas, three years ago, the Wisconsin-Madison club team wanted to create something that would allow teams “to meet between nationals, and to keep the excitement of Tennis On Campus growing,” says Rebhun. So in October 2005, the Badger Classic was born. Participation in the tournament quickly blossomed. The 2007 event attracted about 250 players from 25 schools across the country to Wisconsin’s Nielsen Tennis Center. “It took 10 months to plan,” Rebhun says. He approached local restaurants and other businesses for sponsorships, which helped make the event a success.

Rebhun says Tennis On Campus has been a huge learning experience for him and others in terms of communication, organization, dealing with others and networking. “It’s opened so many



doors for me," he says. "It's mind-boggling to think of all the people that I met, all the connections that I made, all because five people came together three years ago and said, 'You know, we need a club tennis team on campus.'"

Marney Babbitt

Trinity University

AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY IN SAN ANTONIO, 21-year-old Margaret "Marney" Babbitt was a psychology and geoscience student, captain of the women's water polo club, a resident advisor, lifeguard and babysitter—and that was just during her sophomore year. With the full plate she was carrying, she could have easily added "waitress" to that résumé.

Instead, at the start of Babbitt's junior year, the former high school tennis player and three of her friends founded a Tennis On Campus program. She learned about Tennis On Campus from Virginia Fraser, a former Trinity women's varsity tennis captain. Fraser used the social networking site Facebook to send information about the program to Trinity students who listed tennis as an interest in their profiles. "That's how we got the original 40 team members," says Babbitt, now a senior at Trinity and a runner-up for the NIRSA/USTA National Student Tennis Ace Award.

Starting the club tennis team had its challenges. "Trinity's athletic department has a rule stating that if a varsity sport exists on campus, there cannot be a club sport in that same sport," says Babbitt. But with 16 courts on campus and a large demand from students, Babbitt pressed on. She and a classmate garnered support from Trinity's associate athletic director for Recreational Sports, Jacob Tingle; the men's and women's varsity tennis coach, Butch Newman; and the USTA. With no facility or scheduling conflicts, Athletic Director Bob King granted an exception to the rule. The team's probationary year was successful, and this year membership grew to more than 60 members.

The fact that Babbitt didn't give up "speaks volumes about the kind of person she is," says Tingle. "It also speaks volumes as to the need we had on campus. Marney recognized that and continued to fight for those who wanted the opportunity to participate in tennis."

The Trinity club tennis team is all about opportunities to play. "There are some people who really just want to come out and hit with us, and that's great, and there are some people who want to come out and compete with us, and that's great, too," says Babbitt.

The team practices twice a week, with drills at the beginning and matches later. Team members also have a choice to play matches and tournaments against other schools in the USTA Tex-



as Section. Members of the club team also have taken on a teaching role in the San Antonio community. At the Mark Twain Middle School, Babbitt and her teammates lend a hand teaching tennis.

"Marney is a great student leader," says the USTA's Arrington. "She is passionate about tennis and has taken an active role to grow the game on campus."

Tennis On Campus has afforded Babbitt valuable experiences, like the opportunity to be a leader on campus. In the fall, she will take her talents to the University of South Carolina, where she will work toward a master's degree in higher education administration. Still, she has high hopes for the club team she helped start.

"I want to see the Trinity team continue to grow and do all the good things it is doing—giving students an outlet to play and compete," says Babbitt, "as well as forming relationships with students and faculty at Trinity, in the community and with other club teams across the state and country. And I really want to see us go to the National Championship." 🎾

MARK HUMPHRIES