Calendar of Events

Nov. 23-27
St. Louis
National Open Boys & Girls 18's
Sunset Tennis Center

Nov. 24-26
St. Louis
USTA Missouri Valley NTRP
& Open Indoor Championships
Creve Coeur Racquet Club

Nov. 25
Wichita, Kan.
Champions for Charity
Featuring Andy Roddick,
Luke and Murphy Jensen,
and Brenda Schultz-McCarthy

Dec. 1-3
Joplin & Kanas City, Mo.
Wichita & Topeka, Kan.
Indoor December Futures

Dec. 8-10
Overland Park, Kan.
USTA Missouri Valley
Annual Conference

Dec. 8
Overland Park, Kan.
USTA Missouri Valley
Jr. & High School Coaches Clinic
Indian Creek Racquet Club

Dec. 9
Overland Park, Kan.
USTA Missouri Valley
2006 Awards & Hall of Fame
Induction Luncheon
Sheraton Overland Park Hotel

Dec. 10
Overland Park, Kan.
USTA Missouri Valley
Meeting of the Association
Sheraton Overland Park Hotel

Dec. 15-17
Kansas City, Mo.
Indoor December Futures

Jan. 16-19
Topeka, Kan.
Kansas Recreation & Park
Association Conference

Feb. 8-11
Atlanta
Community Tennis
Development Workshop

Feb. 11
Little Amana, Iowa
Iowa District
Semi-Annual Meeting

Feb. 12-18
Joplin, Mo.
Men's $50,000
Pro Circuit Challenger

Feb. 17-18
Des Moines, Iowa
USTA Missouri Valley
Tennis On Campus
Championships

March 6-9
Springfield, Mo.
Missouri Park & Recreation
Association Meeting

March 23-28
Tucson, Ariz.
USTA National
Annual Meeting

April 2-4
Waterloo, Iowa
Iowa Park & Recreation
Association Conference

April 14
Kansas City, Mo.
USTA Missouri Valley
Semi-Annual Meeting

April 26-28
Overland Park, Kan.
Central District
AHPERD Convention

April 26-28
Cary, N.C.
USTA National
Tennis on Campus
Championships

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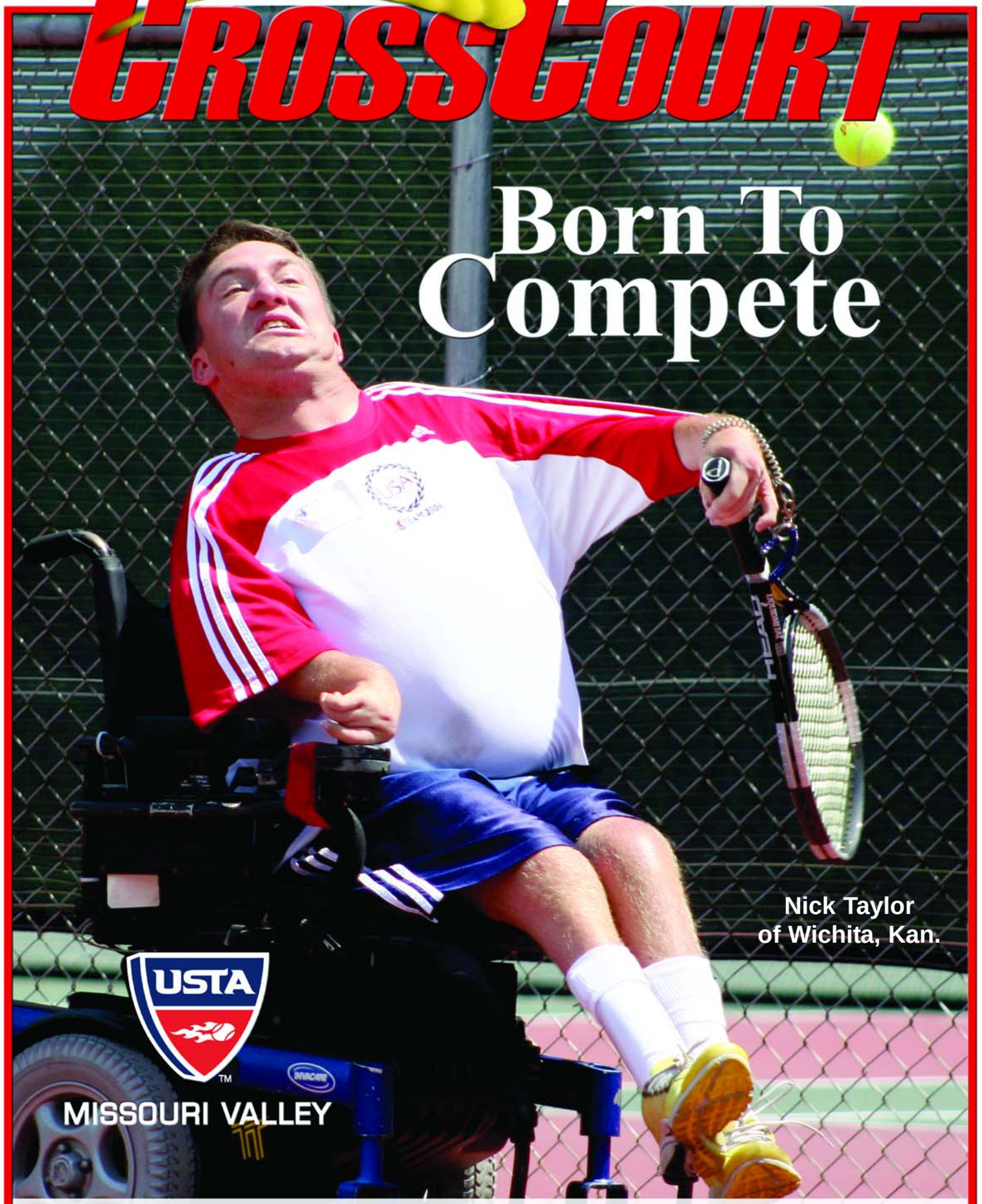
CrossCourt

Vol. 2 • No. 2 Fall / Winter 2006

CrossCourt



Born To Compete

Nick Taylor
of Wichita, Kan.

Changing Lives On & Off The Court Page 3
Playing In 'Tennis Heaven' Page 6

USTA MISSOURI VALLEY

The USTA Missouri Valley publishes *CrossCourt* quarterly, focusing specifically on the members and events in the section. Your feedback is welcome.

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We encourage you to "go to the net" and keep updated at your USTA Missouri Valley Section Web site.

Learn more... Stay informed... Your section Web site is a great source for upcoming events, features, photos, results and more. Plus, you can download back issues of *CrossCourt*.

Our game is growing! Our participation is up!

Thanks to video games, America has become a nation overflowing with *virtual* athletic superstars. EA Sports, for instance, can make someone who's never donned ice skates a hockey phenom — greater than Gretzky.

Seems the only sports injury some people risk sustaining is a jammed finger from banging away at their keyboard while "playing sports" on their computer. Think I'm exaggerating? At the turn of the new century, participation in sports is down across the board.

With one exception. Tennis.

That's right — tennis! According to the *Sporting Goods Manufactures Association (SGMA) 2006 Superstudy*, tennis is the one and only "traditional sport" to experience a growth spurt between 2000 and 2005. Check out the chart below: Football is down, baseball, basketball and golf too.

While other sports must concentrate on stopping the downward slide, we in tennis are moving forward. The game is growing. The USTA's goal of 30 million participations by 2010 is within our reach. "It's Your Game"™ is a slogan more and more people are taking it to heart.

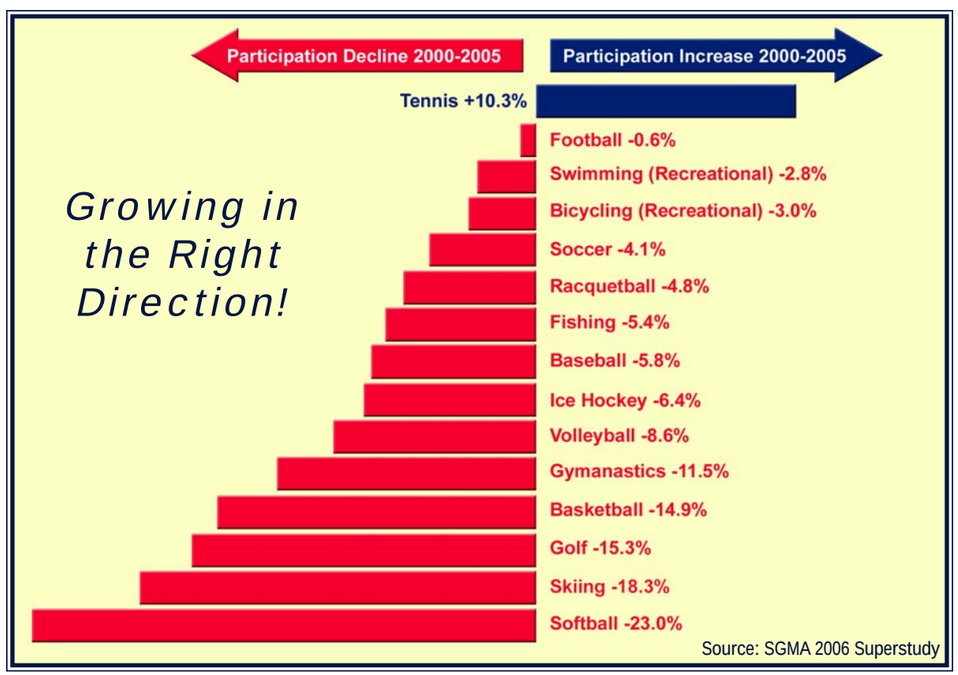
Racquet sales are up 26.4 percent over the last three years — 21.6 percent among adults and 41.2 among youths. That latter number tells me we're getting kids to give the game a try, and I suspect we've got a lot of parents buying new racquets to go play the game with their kids. That family aspect — playing together, sticking together — is uniquely tennis.

Junior programs are really starting to take hold at the middle school level, helping give newbies to the game an introduction to tennis that encourages them to keep coming back for more.

Volunteers here in the Missouri Valley and across the nation in the USTA's other 16 sections are making it happen. They are spreading the word. They are starting and operating programs, like National Junior Tennis League chapters or Junior Team Tennis. They are providing lessons for kids and urging former players to get back on the court — to rediscover that tennis is their game.

Plus, we have some high-profile players who truly give back to the game. Take Luke Jensen, our special guest at the USTA Missouri Valley Annual Conference Dec. 8-10. His passion for tennis is contagious. He has been a frequent visitor to our section, preaching his tennis gospel.

Among Luke's great complaints is the false perception that tennis is "dying." The reality is just the opposite. Tennis is alive and doing well — and getting better.



Tennis & Education

Program helps kids on the court and off

Changing lives through tennis is the ultimate goal of the United States Tennis Association, but, by no means is the organization limited to just putting racquets in the hands of those wanting to play.

The USTA also has a charitable wing — the USTA Tennis & Education Foundation — a branch that extends much deeper and tries to create educational opportunities as well for children. With annual scholarships for high-achieving high school academic performers who play tennis and donations given to service organizations and National Junior Tennis Leagues (NJTL) stressing both the benefits of education and tennis, the USTA aims to do more than just get kids on the court. The goal is to help improve their lives off of the court, too.

A perfect example of the impact the USTA is making outside the lines is in Des Moines, Iowa, with Children and Family Urban Ministries (CFUM). CFUM is a faith-based service group that concentrates on expanding educational and recreational opportunities for low-income minority children, provides mentoring, and offers meals before and after school.

All of the 57 kids CFUM serves each day come from the Moulton Extended Learning Center, a Pre-K - eighth grade school located next to CFUM.

CFUM kids are learning valuable lessons on the court and inside their computer lab.

INDIRECT ROUTE A USTA Missouri Valley organizational member and NJTL chapter, CFUM received a $12,000 grant in 2005 to purchase 14 new computers for its computer lab, a gift that has been very well-received.

Grants like the one CFUM was given have shown that the approach the USTA is taking to grow the game isn't always a direct route starging with racquets and tennis balls. By trying to partner with organizations like CFUM that attempt to improve children's lives away from the court, the USTA hopes to create partnerships that will expose tennis to kids who might not otherwise get the chance. In CFUM's case the goal to eventually get more junior players participating had both an educational and tennis aspect.

"Right away, (the computers we purchased from the Tennis & Education Foundation Grant) became a huge asset for us," said Linda Danielson, program director at CFUM and the NJTL chapter leader. "The kids know that the equipment they've received has come from tennis, and I think that really made our enrollment higher for the summer in 2006. It's a big draw for them. It was a mad rush to get into the computer room those first few weeks when they arrived, and still is."

GETTING THE BALL ROLLING CFUM added a tennis component to its multi-sport "Awesome Summer Days" program a couple of years ago after a volunteer, Jen Gibson, then a tennis player on the nearby Simpson College team and intern for CFUM, helped introduce the sport. A field trip to Des Moines' Birdland Park for a tennis outing in the summer of 2004 also led to a chance meeting with John Terpkosh, a USTA Missouri Valley program manager for Community Tennis. The group was playing with outdated wood racquets that day, because it was all they had.

Terpkosh took note and set about seeing what the USTA could do to help develop a tennis program at CFUM, starting with updating the group's equipment. District and section grants helped with needed upgrades for on-court equipment, and with Terpkosh's assistance, CFUM enlisted a part-time coach to get tennis balls rolling for summer and fall programs.

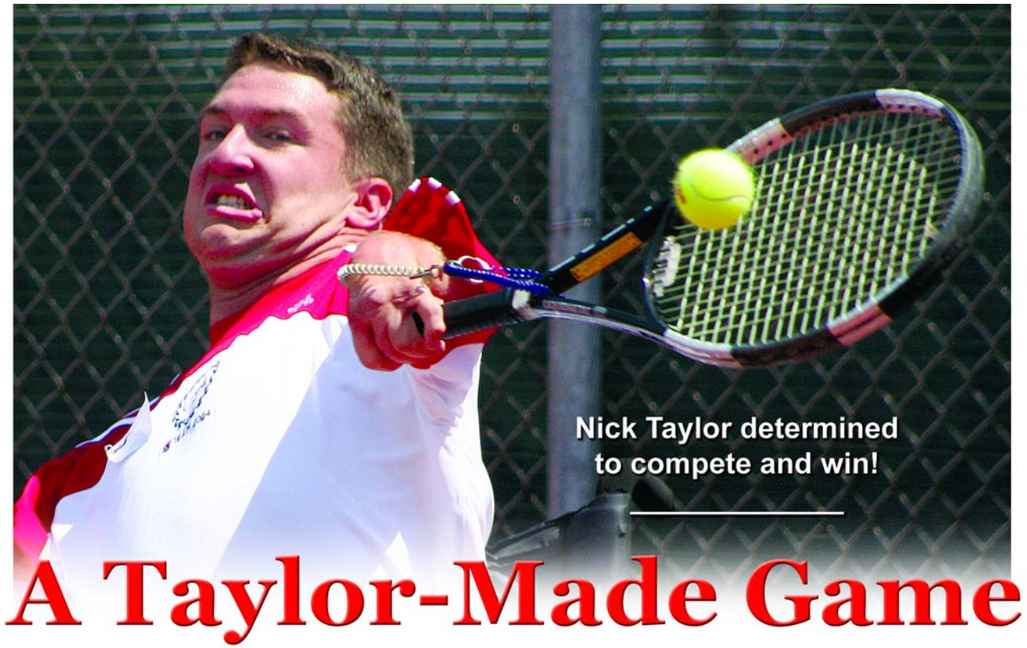
But nothing at that time was in more need of updating than CFUM's computer lab. So Terpkosh suggested the group apply for a Tennis & Education Grant.

"After I saw their lab, it just made sense that they would be a good qualifier for the grant," said Terpkosh. "It's a nice thing to do, and makes a big impact to make that kind of offering to a group like (CFUM). I also think they're very committed to tennis and will be in the future because of this."

PAYING DIVIDENDS The gift paid immediate dividends. Though the most pressing needs of the children at CFUM aren't technological, the computers added a sense of pride for participants, especially in their schoolwork. The computers' arrival helped improve grades for many students, almost immediately. CFUM participants like Jordan Sagastizado even used the computers to type out entries for "Come Out Swinging," a tennis essay contest in Iowa.

In his touching piece about his first experience with tennis,

See EDUCATION ▪ Page 7



A Taylor-Made Game

Tales of tennis greatness can be traced back to some players' first time on the court. You've heard the story before: the precocious ball-striking ability that causes jaws to drop, the innate gifts that made seemingly impossible shots possible, the rough edges that go smooth so fast.

A natural-born winner. That's Roger Federer's story.

It isn't Nick Taylor's.

The Wichita, Kan., native's competitve spirit has driven him to overcome something he was born with — a rare disease — to become a world-renowned tennis figure. Arthrogryposis, which means, when translated from the Greek, "curved or hooked joints," severly limits Taylor's range of motion. He must use an electric wheelchair.

That makes playing tennis a tricky proposition. Still, striking a tennis ball with uncanny control is what Taylor, 27, does better than most, depsite literally gripping the handle of his racquet backwards.

It's unorthodox but effective.

WINNING AROUND THE WORLD Taylor is living proof that focus and grit — plus a little invention — go a long way. He's been proving it since his earliest days in the sport, when his motivation was to make his high school varsity tennis team at Wichita West. He wanted to show he could play and win.

And Taylor did. He became the first wheelchair player in Kansas high school history to compete against and defeat able-bodied players.

Currently ranked No. 3 in the world in the International Tennis Federation's (ITF) men's quadriplegic singles, Taylor continues to make waves as the most accomplished active player hailing from the USTA Missouri Valley — and with the hardware to back it up.

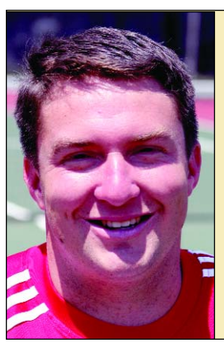
It'd be a safe bet at any wheelchair tournament of any significance that the championship trophy already has Taylor's name engraved on it — probably more than once. He's been ranked No. 1 and holds more than 100 tournament titles, including three US Opens. Taylor is a three-time World Team Cup champion (the wheelchair equivalent of Davis Cup), and, in 2004, he won the doubles gold medal at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens, Greece, with partner David Wagner (Oro Valley, Ariz.).

But Taylor's journey from beginner to No. 1 in the world wasn't the near effortless ascension Federer's was. Far from it.

Determined to play a sport in high school and knowing contact sports were totally out of the question, Taylor turned to tennis. But gripping a racquet was an all together different experience for Taylor compared to his other love, wheelchair soccer, which he has played since his youngest days.

GETTING A GRIP Born without a bicep in either arm and with severely limited use of his hands, Taylor learned to play tennis like many other kids. He hit thousands of balls against the garage of his parent's home, using a grip that would break most people's wrists if they were to try it. That's Taylor's tennis game in a nutshell: It may look a bit awkward, but the results are pure beauty.

Nick's Numbers



Born/Resides	Wichita, Kan			
Age	27			
Highest Ranking	1 (currently No. 3 in singles & No. 2 in doubles)			
Professional Tournaments Won	More than 100			
Paralympic Gold Medalists	2004			(Quad doubles with David Wagner)
US Open Singles Titles	2000	2002	2005	
US Open Doubles Titles	2004	2006		(Both with partner David Wagner)
US Open Mixed Doubles Titles	2005			(with partner Tiffany Gellar)
U.S. World Team Cup Championships	2003	2005	2006	
Sponsors	Head			Invacare (wheelchair manufacturer)
	Adidas			PantherVision (hands-free lighting equipment)

"I started on the driveway about nine months before going to high school," said Taylor. "From after school until way past dark everyday, I'd be out there banging the ball against the garage. Any free time I had, I was out there."

Developing a steady stroke was a daunting challenge. Taylor had no tennis manual to follow. He had to "Taylor-make" his game. Like everything else with his tennis, determination and ingenuity paved the way.

Taylor struggled just to keep a secure hold on his racquet the first few months he played. The racquet, taped to his hand, tended to go flying as the tape snapped under the strain because Taylor rarely holds anything back when swinging. He swings like a pendulum into every shot. On the advice of his father — and after a few racquets ricocheted and hit him in the head — Taylor began using a slinky keychain attached to the racquet handle and secured tightly around his wrist. Problem solved.

"(As wheelchair players), we all face challenges with our handicaps," said Tiffany Gellar (Redondo Beach Calif.), who has been playing mixed doubles with Taylor the last two years. (The pair won the 2005 US Open mixed doubles title.) "Nick's handicap is not even the normal challenge that we see. His are very new. But he has the frame of mind to not give up, whether it's a tough travel day, a broken part on his chair, or a tough match. There's always a way to make it happen, and Nick's an example of that. He's always out there thinking harder than most, because he's a competitor and because he has to."

'FOOTWORK' There's also the matter of the electric chair, one of the elements that make Taylor's game so unique. Taylor says he's one of about three players on the ITF Circuit using a motorized chair. His "footwork" with the chair is masterful, feathering the chair's controls with his right hand to always arrive on spot, usually for a wicked lefty topspin forehand.

An admitted "gearhead," Taylor has learned to tinker with, repair and max out the settings on his Invacare sports chair, which has a sticker price that would rival some new cars.

Taylor has also had to make alterations to his service toss. His right arm is incapable of tossing a ball upward. Using a patented "flip" move gleaned from his soccer days, Taylor scoops the ball up with his feet, lets the ball rest on his toes, kicks the ball up, and then, at just the right height, *whack!* It's a marvel to behold and a totally legal move.

"It's incredible to watch Nick play," said United States World Team Cup coach Dan James. "Watch him out there and you just see wheelchair tennis as a pure sport. He's amazing."

More than ingenuity or mechanical wizardry, Taylor's game is a product of hard work and endless repetition.

"When I started, I was so bad," said Taylor, recalling a spring 1995 exhibition in Wichita, where he met former world champion Randy Snow. "I wasn't uncoordinated too badly, I just had no strength. Honestly, I went into the exhibition that day thinking that I was going to beat the No. 1 player in the world. Now, in hindsight, I couldn't imagine it, knowing all it's taken to get from that point to now."

Added Taylor, "When I started (on the driveway), my hands would be literally dripping blood, and my thumbs would be so raw from playing all day. But I'd just keep on playing. I wanted to learn and I wanted to be good. I wasn't going to stop."

And he hasn't. Taylor was born to compete.

His tennis exploits have landed him on the world stage. He has visited more countries than a United Nations diplomat, globe trotting to play the ITF Circuit. Taylor calls the expense and rigmarole involved with being a wheelchair world traveler "a nightmare."

"I love being at the places and playing the tournaments, but getting to them is an incredible hassle," said Taylor.

This year alone, Taylor has played U.S. events in Atlanta (twice), Belleville, Ill., Boca Raton, Fla., and San Diego. International travel, though, is essentially mandatory to reach the upper echelon of the professional world rankings. Taylor has hopped the pond to play in England, Italy, Brazil and the Netherlands (twice) in the last 12 months.

A 'NATURAL' Taylor's tennis has also taken him to Australia, Greece, Holland, New Zealand, Poland and France. It's a barely break-even job, but one Taylor still enjoys. It has given him the opportunity to see the world, make lasting friendships and stoke his competitive fire.

"Nick loves everything to do with tennis, and he's a phenomenal player and inspiration for everyone," said Wichita State men's head coach Darius Schwarz, a frequent hitting partner and friend of Taylor's. "I think the best example of how inspirational he is was last year when we had this fund-raiser for Nick to help offset the costs of some of his travel. All the guys on the team put in their time and own money. Mind you, these are college players who don't have a lot of money, but they wanted to help him out because of all he does for us." (Taylor assists with the Wichita State men's team.)

Nick Taylor uses some fancy footwork for his service toss.

Taylor is also on a quest to complete his master's degree in sports administration from Wichita State in the spring of 2007. He has already earned two bachelor's degrees from the school. Taylor also gives back to the game, playing the occasional exhibition to promote awareness of the sport.

"I don't know where I'd be or what my life would be like without tennis," said Taylor. "I'm sure I'd be doing something somewhere, hopefully with a good job and being happy.

"But now I know whatever I do, I'll always want to be a tennis player."

In Tennis Heaven

Missourian enjoys the game in a 'paradise' setting

By **Skip Walther**
USTA Missouri District President

I have been looking forward to a vacation at the Colony Resort on Longboat Key near Sarasota, Fla., since winning an eight-day stay at the silent auction held at the 2005 USTA Missouri Valley Annual Conference. I chose to use it during the USTA Men's 50 National Clay Court Tournament held at the Bath and Tennis Club in Sarasota, Oct. 8-15, 2006.

My wife and I flew in to Tampa the evening on Oct. 7 (my birthday) and we were able to rent a car from Hertz with Sirius Satellite radio just in time to tune it to the beginning of the MU-Texas Tech football game.

It took just over an hour to make the drive from Tampa to The Colony. I was reluctant to leave the car because of the game broadcast but hunger took over and we checked in and headed over to the Monkey Bar -- one of the two restaurants at The Colony.

The weather was beautiful: clear dark sky, about 77 degrees with a light sea breeze. We were seated on an outside patio with a view of the ocean and, quite surprisingly, the televised broadcast of the MU game still in progress.

The Colony mainly consists of a number of small buildings housing perhaps a dozen condominiums each. Our condo was a one-bedroom unit in the building next to the beach, and parking was very convenient.

The Colony boasts 21 tennis courts, hard and soft, clustered in groups of two, four or six. It appears that each condo building is adjacent to at least one tennis court cluster, so the sound of string on ball is everywhere. I used the clay courts for practicing for the tournament, which was very convenient as the tournament facility did not always have available practice courts.

Surprisingly, I ran in to Marc Gelina on my way over to the pro shop at the Colony. Mark is a gifted tennis player in my age group and a tennis pro in Wichita, Kan., but he wasn't here for the tournament; he had organized a tennis trip for 21 of his club members to the Colony. They were all smiling.

The next day brought morning temps in the low 70's with some breeze. Humidity was not yet overbearing. I was barely able to defeat my first opponent 7-5 in the third. He had one of those forehands you simply watch most of the time, but I was able to find the other parts of his game just enough to be successful.

I found myself on day two of the tournament facing some guy from Michigan no one had heard of in the round of 32. Now I know who he is: Phil Norville. He wasted little time showing me how to play appropriately on clay, and dispatched me 1 and 4. That was the bad news. The good news was that it meant I did not have to play my doubles partner, who was my scheduled opponent in the round of 16 had I won. My partner -- Oliver Scott -- was the third seed, and he was able to defeat Phil 7-5 in the third after repelling four match points.

Thursday came with the Florida humidity and strong sun. Heavy duty sunscreen was a must. We were able to take advantage of The Colony's beach because of a default in doubles. The sand is not light and fluffy; rather, the slightly coarse sand carries many shell fragments, but only a beach aficionado would complain. The beach is spacious, and The Colony places plentiful beach chairs and palm huts throughout its area. Very comfortable.

A nice amenity at The Colony is the deli named Tastebuds. Fresh Starbucks coffee was available every morning along with a variety of pastries. Lunch offered a large number of deli options, and the sandwiches I tried were outstanding. The deli also serves as a small market and wine shop offering staples and forgotten toiletries, beer, wine and spirits.

Resort employees everywhere are known for their friendliness, but even the maids and laborers went out of their way to make us feel welcome. The tennis desk called constantly to make sure we were not overlooked. Customer service here was truly outstanding.

After losing in the singles main draw, I was able to overcome two more opponents before falling to a clay court specialist in the backdraw, and my partner and I failed to convert two set points in the semis before losing to the No. 1 seed. All in all, the tournament was great fun as the opportunity to match up with national competition is always rewarding.

Despite the drive, The Colony was certainly the right choice for accommodations. A beach side resort catering to tennis players is a special treat, and one I hope to revisit.

EDUCATION ▪ From Page 3

Sagastizado wrote how he enjoyed the rhythm of the sport. He also mentioned he hoped to "keep playing tennis in the future and continue to get better." But it was the last words of his letter that really hit an ace for the Tennis & Education Foundation: "I would like to show other kids how much fun it is to play tennis."

Tennis players who come from disadvantaged backgrounds but develop a deep love for the sport are what the USTA hopes to breed by partnering with groups like CFUM for Tennis and Education Grants. Sagastizado loves the sport now and envisions playing his whole life.

"The kids here really love playing tennis, and as far as their reaction to the sport, it's just been fabulous," said Danielson. "Our goal now is just to sustain and improve what we have. We want these kids to keep having positive outlets like this."

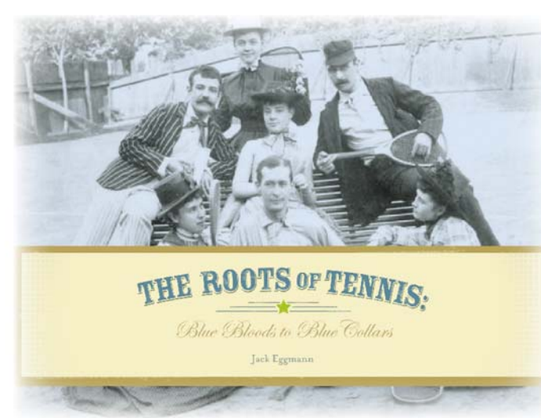
To learn more about applying for grants contact your district's Tennis Service Representative or download an application at usta.com.

Tennis & Education Grants/Scholarships in USTA Missouri Valley in 2006

Stephanie Waterman Tennis & Whole Child Program (Kansas City, Mo.)	$20,000
Jensen-Schmidt Academy for Downs Syndrome (St. Louis)	$12,500
Aces Grant Winner	
United Neighbors, Inc. (Davenport, Iowa)	$20,000
Mass Mutual Scholarships	
Janet Buntain (Fort Scott, Kan.)	$5,000
Bruce Maytubby (Anadarko, Okla.)	$5,000

When you renew your membership, you have the option of making a voluntary contribution to the USTA Tennis & Education Foundation online, with a portion going directly to the USTA Section Foundation in your community.

HOW AN UNLIKELY CRADLE OF TENNIS SPAWNED GREAT CHAMPIONS.



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Blue Bloods to Blue Collars *by* Jack Eggmann
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