

Junior Tennis On The Rise

BY JAMES ZUG

The future of the game is now. Junior tennis is thriving like it never has before. It is providing a stable and ever-replicating foundation for the game going forward in addition to adding, in the very present, teenage moxie and collegiate enthusiasm to our clubs, leagues, tournaments and galleries. There are the bi-annual Van Alen and Clothier Cups, a burgeoning junior nationals tournament in singles and doubles, a national parent & child and junior weekends. There are more than fifty active junior members of the USCTA.

This is a far cry from twenty years ago. The calendar was noticeably bereft of opportunities for juniors. The US Father & Son was started in 1976, and Philadelphia hosted it each Christmas holiday. Until the 1990s it was the sole national tournament open specifically to juniors. In the 1970s and 80s Jimmy Dunn organized two afternoon junior clinics each year in Philadelphia, one during the Christmas holidays before the Father & Son and the other in the spring. After the clinics, he ran a one-day under eighteen year-old, intra-club junior tournament, the so-called Philadelphia Junior Singles. "It was pretty informal," remembered Morris Clothier, "though you did get your name up on the wall in gold paint if you won. We were all pretty terrified of Jimmy."

The only other event was the legendary Van Alen Cup, which was run more or less by the Van Alen family and the later by Bill Clothier, independently of the USCTA. In 1956 Jimmy Van Alen, who had studied at Cambridge in the 1920s, decided to launch a court tennis version of the Prentice Cup — an Oxford & Cambridge v. Harvard & Yale six-man biennial lawn tennis competition started in 1921. The plan was a biennial match between a British team from Oxford and Cambridge (which has almost always been the case) and a US team from American universities (which has been the case less often). In time, the Van Alen Cup has extended the age limits of its players to



2009 Lieb Cup. photo by Jane Lippincott

Van Alen and Clothier Cup Players

Randy Hackett
Edward P. Harding
Nicholas Luddington
George Reindel
George Unhoch
James Van Alen, II
William Van Alen, Jr

S. Beere
G.H. Bostwick, Jr.
D.F. Davis, III
Edward P. Harding
Dinny Phipps
R. Plum
Roger Tuckerman
Ramsay W. Vehslage
Stephen T. Vehslage

Grenville T. Emmet, III
Michael Flynn
R. Gerry
M.O. Phipps
R. Plum
Stephen T. Vehslage

William Corey
William Forbes
Archibald Gwathmey
McKinley C. McAdoo

Graham Arader, III
Archibald Gwathmey
Glen Koach
McKinley C. McAdoo

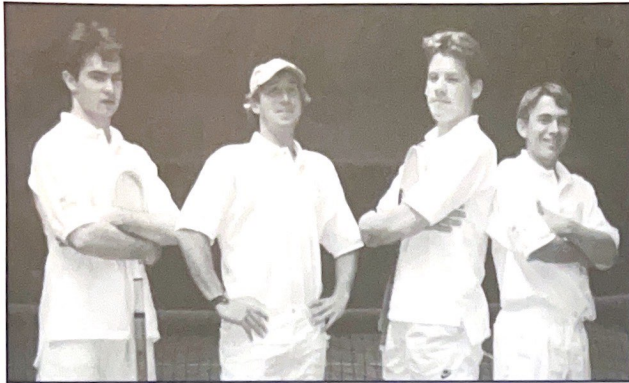
1956

1958

1960

1968

1972



1996 Van Alen Cup Team. Peter Fagan, Drew McGowan, Robert Devens and Gabe Kinzler.
photo by Andy Kinzler

twenty-five and under and the tour, previously three weeks, has now shrunk a bit. But the twenty-seven Van Alen Cups have been incredibly galvanic: they have provided an enormous groundwork for US junior tennis, a major incentive for younger players, a proving ground and a way to create life-long international and national friendships. For future World Champion Pete Bostwick, the 1958 Van Alen Cup in New York was an early opportunity to play competitive tennis; for current world #2 Camden Riviere more than forty years later, it gave him an early chance to play the world's best juniors.

Besides the Van Alen Cup, things were pretty somnolent for juniors in America. Junior boys were not allowed to play in New York, except on Sunday mornings. A few members' children got on in Tuxedo, Aiken, Greentree and Boston. Tommy Greevy sometimes ran clinics at Tuxedo

during the holidays. In March 1956 Jimmy Van Alen also started an intercollegiate tournament, which in the 1960s was revamped as a team event and then revived as an individual tourney again in the 1970s, but it quietly petered out after the 1987 edition.

After Newport was renovated and reopened in 1980, Jack Slater, the president of the USCTA, pushed an effort to promote junior play at our country's first public facility. To facilitate, Slater asked two former court tennis greats to help: A.B. Martin, the former US Tennis Association president, and Bill Clothier, a longtime lawn tennis administrator and tournament director. Martin and Clothier had created a financing vehicle used to raise tax-deductible funds for the Newport restoration. Using that as a start, they went on to raise more than \$100,000, some of which went towards junior tennis — clinics, lessons, the Van Alen Cup, etc. — in the 1980s and 90s. The fund was used as a financial basis for the US Court Tennis Preservation Foundation when that was created in the late 1990s.

In 1991 Ed Hughes, who succeeded Slater as president of the USCTA, and Andy Kinzler in Philadelphia decided to launch a national junior tournament. "The court tennis committee at the RCOP was very enthusiastic about the idea and Ed greatly encouraged us," said Andy. "Gabe [Andy's twelve year-old son] was tired of playing guys five or six times his age. It just seemed like the time was ripe to do something." The first junior nationals, held in March 1992, had ten players, all but one from Philadelphia, including one technically well beyond the age eligibility limits of twenty-one years of age. There were two draws, based

Graham Arader, III
Peter Clement
Archibald Gwathmey
McKinley C. McAdoo

Christopher Loughran
Jay Mirkil
Peter Thompson
Peter Vogt

George DeB. Bell, Jr.
Jay Mirkil
Peter Thompson
Peter Vogt

George DeB. Bell, Jr.
James Knott

Francis D. Baltzell
Morris W. Clothier
Geoffrey Kennedy
Henry DuP. Smith

1974

1976

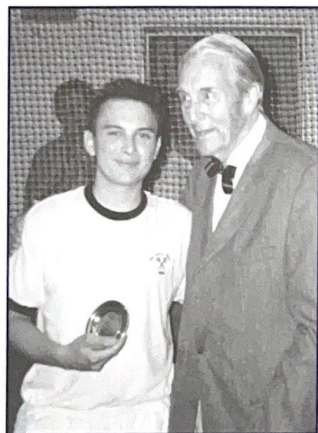
1978

1980

1984

on age not handicap. Both the under-15 and over-15 draws were round robins, with Gabe Kinzler, an eighth grader, winning the former and Drew McGowan, then a sophomore in college, winning the latter. The USCTA donated funds to help the tournament get going—there were no entry fees but players had to become USCTA “junior members” (a category created for the event) for \$25—and gave each participant a free racquet. Kinzler hosted an exhibition match, Hughes came to present the trophies and racquets and Mayer Brandschain, the timeless squash and court tennis reporter, wrote articles for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

As the years progressed, the national juniors grew in size and scope. Having a national championship helped focus young players. “I flew up alone to Philadelphia for my first tournament when I was about ten,” remembered



Gabe Kinzler and William Clothier.
photo by Andy Kinzler

Camden Riviere, “and Andy picked me up at the airport, billeted me with Gabe and everything. It was so exciting to see the other guys playing, to see how far I needed to go and how good Gabe was. And now a dozen years later, Gabe’s my training partner.”

Moreover, in 1996 the National Championship became international. Jonathan Howell brought over six Oratory and Seacourt



The 1958 Van Alen Cup: (Top Row) Stephen T. Vehslage, D. Lowe, W. Gunnery, Claude Beere, D. Lawrence, C. Gunnery, D.F. Davis, III, R. Newman and R. Plum; (Bottom Row) Murray Glover, Roger Tuckerman, Ian Baily, Jimmy Van Alen, I. Stewart, Ramsay Vehslage, J. Hogber and Ed Harding; (Top Bubbles) Pete Bostwick and Dinny Phipps.

boys, which significantly improved the level of play and the fun. The Racquet Club of Philadelphia was able to put up all the out-of-towners in the old second-floor dining room (now a conference room); late night billiards play and a dip in the swimming pool helped encourage long-lasting friendships. In 1998 Howell led a second British invasion, with nine juniors coming from Bristol & Bath, Oratory and Seacourt, giving the tournament twenty-four entrants in three draws (including the first girl, Lucinda Moorhead from Washington). In 2000 Kate Leeming brought six British boys to the tournament, helping boost its numbers to a record high of thirty.

By then, Americans were flying the other way across the pond. Gabe Kinzler made it to the finals of the B

Van Alen and Clothier Cup Players

Morris Clothier
Alf Kennedy
Geoffrey Kennedy
Daniel McCormick
Henry DuP. Smith

Russell Ball
Beau Buford
Geoffrey Kennedy
Terry Spahr

Beau Buford
Pablo Cappello
Steven Simpson, Jr.
Mark Slater

C. Andrew McGowan
Radcliff L. Romeyn, III
Jesse F. Sammis, IV
James L. Van Alen, Jr.

Jonathan Lutes
C. Andrew McGowan
Steven Simpson, Jr.
Nick Sonne

Robert Devens
Peter Fagan
Gabe Kinzler
C. Andrew McGowan

1986

1988

1990

1992

1994

1996

division (under 16s) of the 1995 British national juniors and in 1998 Barney Tanfield won the A division (under 18s). Bradley Allen won the B division in 1998 and the A division in 1999 and 2000. Those three years, Allen was billeted with Chris Ronaldson, who helped coordinate Allen's application to Harrow School where he spent a post-graduate year. Moreover, in 1996 the US won the Van Alen Cup for the first time since 1984, a sign of renewed vitality in the American junior game.

In 1997, after trying to expand the Van Alen Cup to include other nations, Ed Hughes launched the Clothier Cup. A biennial junior competition between Australia and the US, Ed Hughes named the cup for Bill Clothier, who as the trophy states was a "gentleman, sportsman and friend of junior tennis around the world." The addition of the Clothier Cup meant that every summer American juniors (twenty-five or under) have the opportunity to either tour Great Britain or Australia or host a visiting side.



Juniors Gabe Kinzler and Barney Tanfield in 1995.

Making summer tennis an annual activity for top juniors and adding a second country to tour heightened the positive effects of the two cups. "My Facebook



2001 Clothier Cup Team. Camden Riviere, Peter Fagan, Gabe Kinzler and Barney Tanfield. photo by Andy Kinzler

page is filled with friends from the cups," said Barney Tanfield. "The tours were just fantastic experiences. You get treated unbelievably well and form really great friendships. You know, the junior scene in the States was never that big a demographic, so the cups were an immensely important reminder that there were a lot of other kids playing around the world, guys that you'd grow up with and now we see each other as adults."

Gabe Kinzler echoed Tanfield's assessment. "With the Van Alen and Clothier Cups, court tennis became a religion for so many of us. It was so rewarding and so amazingly fun that for years we wondered if there was more to life outside this idyllic world of tennis." "I loved every minute of it," said Allen, who played on a record eight Cup teams.

Robert Devens
Peter Fagan
Gabe Kinzler
Barney Tanfield
Robert D. White, III

Robert Devens
Peter Fagan
Garrett Frank
C. Andrew McGowan

Bradley Allen
Peter Fagan
Gabe Kinzler
Barney Tanfield

Bradley Allen
Josh Bainton
Peter Fagan
Eitan Sabo

Peter Fagan
Gabe Kinzler
Barney Tanfield
Camden Riviere

Bradley Allen
Peter Fagan
Gabe Kinzler
Peter Pell
Barney Tanfield

1997

1998

1999

2000

2001

2002

One of the effects of the growth in junior tennis in the past two decades is the rise of a new generation of American-born professionals. Three of the thirteen active US-based pros are products of the junior program: Gabe Kinzler (Aiken), Camden Riviere (Boston) and Barney Tanfield (Philadelphia). (You could also include Josh Bainton, who was a pro at Newport and still coaches and plays in pro tournaments.) To have twenty percent of our professional positions filled by Americans who first learned the game as juniors is a remarkable fact. The junior program is now a hitherto unexplored method of developing American-born professionals. Previously we either hoped for an overseas pro to come over or for Jimmy Dunn to recruit another East Falls boy to work at the Racquet Club of Philadelphia. Recruiting and retaining professionals is always a fragile operation in the US and creating this alternative avenue has strengthened our game.

In addition, Cam Riviere has risen to a number two ranking in the world and in 2008 challenged for the world championship. To have a former American junior on the cusp of becoming world champion is a remarkable development and something we have not seen since the Knox and Bostwick era of the 1960s and 70s.

Besides the two summer cups, the USCTA and the USCTPF also operate a number of initiatives. Each year they help fund junior handicap weekends, which include a lot of tennis instruction and play. In addition, they now hold a national doubles tournament on a separate weekend from the national singles. The tournament, called the Lieb Cup, was founded in 2000. It is now played in October,



Sandy McAdoo, J. Van Alen & Peter Seabrook at the 1974 Van Alen Cup.

complete with on-court iPod & pizza parties. As the opening weekend for the USCTA fixtures list, it is symbolic of a renewed focus on juniors.

A major Preservation Foundation effort is the Foundation Player Program. Started by Dick Boenning in 2001, the program allocates up to \$1,000 to each club to help reduce or eliminate lesson fees. The players, selected for their potential ability and their likely contributions to the game both on and off the court, are often juniors, so there is now a wonderful avenue for younger players to improve their handicaps.

The Preservation Foundation is also oversees two endowments. A few years after helping build the tennis court in Washington, Fred Prince, the primary benefactor for the

Van Alen and Clothier Cup Players

Peter Pell
Camden Riviere
Nicholas Shumaker
Barney Tanfield

Bradley Allen
Eric Pearson
Camden Riviere
Barney Tanfield

Bradley Allen
Gordon McMorris
Eric Pearson
Barney Tanfield

Bradley Allen
William Broadbent
Eric Pearson
Barney Tanfield

Bradley Allen
William Broadbent
William Thompson
Patrick Winthrop

Bradley Allen
Greg Park
William Thompson
Patrick Winthrop

2003

2004

2005

2006

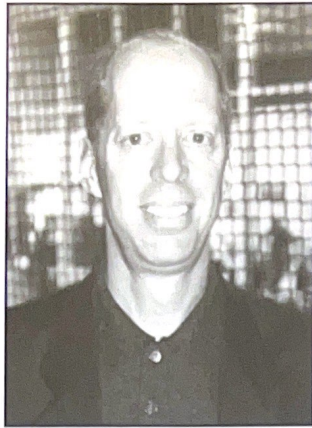
2007

2008

new court, encouraged his Prince Charitable Trusts to donate \$50,000 to develop and sustain a junior program there. That money helps fund lessons, reduces court fees and discounts membership for DC-area juniors.

Rhode Island, though, is the heartland of junior tennis. In 1999 John Lieb died of brain cancer. Lieb, a fiercely enthusiastic player in Newport, willed \$170,000 to the Preservation Foundation as a basis for supporting junior tennis in Newport. "John was very very supportive of junior tennis, even though he had no children of his own," said John Murphy. "He wanted to ensure the future of the game."

The John C. Lieb Memorial Court Tennis Development Fund, administrated by Jane Lippincott, John Murphy, Sheila Reilly, Joe Tomaino and Beth Winthrop, spends about \$9,000 a year on juniors. It offers two weekly afternoon clinics for juniors, one on Wednesdays and one on Sundays, subsidized memberships and support for tournaments. One brilliant move is that each summer the pros bring in all the ball boys and ball girls at the Newport Hall of Fame Championships (the country's only major pro grass court tournament) into the court tennis court for a free in-



John Lieb

roduction to the game.

Pat Winthrop was one of those ball boys. In the past half dozen years since learning the game as a ball boy, he has become the top junior in the country, winning the national junior singles and doubles three times each, getting his parents involved in tennis (and winning the Parent & Child with his mother, Beth) and now at age twenty-two has become one of the top three amateurs in the country. "There is now a tradition and a history that we juniors want to follow," said Winthrop. "With the Van Alen and Clothier Cups, with all the juniors who are now leading the game, we see that there are great benefits to being a part of junior tennis."

Considering that less than a quarter century of concerted effort has been focused on junior tennis, these young players now heavily influence the US game. Seven of the top twenty-five amateurs in the country learned the game as a junior and played for a Van Alen or Clothier Cup team. In 2004 the USCTA had just twenty-nine junior members; five years later they now have fifty-four, an all-time high. There are numerous juniors now coming up through the ranks who are poised to follow in Riviere and Winthrop's footsteps. Dylan Ward in Philadelphia has twice reached the finals of the national juniors. Paul Monaghan, Caroline Lippincott, Dana Kopald, Alex Rodzianko, Jacob Mason, Christian Thorndike, George Handy, Alex Handy, Zach Harrington, Tristan Young, Charles Bostwick and Justin Bartenbach are amongst the leading juniors today. Just imagine where junior tennis and American tennis in general might be in another twenty-five years.

Patrick Haynes
Gordon McMorris
William Broadbent
Patrick Winthrop

2009



Van Alen Cup with Jimmy Van Alen center, Jay Mirkil and George Bell (circa 1978)