

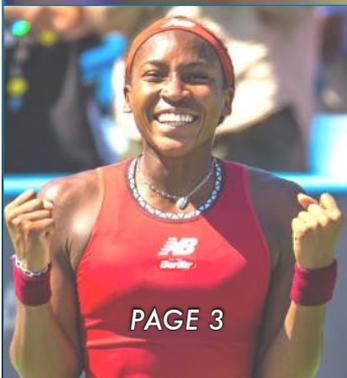
THE EAST ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY TENNIS ASSOCIATION

FIRST SERVICE

E.S.L.C.T.A. MID WINTER 2023 NEWSLETTER



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Our Amazing Year

BY SCOTT STINSON, PRESIDENT EAST ST. LOUIS TENNIS ASSOCIATION (E.S.L.C.T.A.)

Folks,

2023 was an amazing year for our organization. We quite frankly took it to another level taking tennis to more children and adults than ever before. We started the year being approved as a National Junior Tennis & Learning organization by the USTA which opens up many opportunities for all of us.

Our programming this year was expanded and began with two Saturday nights of lessons at St. Clair Tennis Club (thank you to those who came to support us). We then had an opportunity to teach over 400 students PE for three weeks at Lincoln Middle School. As usual, we hosted our free summer programming every Saturday and Sunday from May to October on the Lincoln Park Courts and had an exciting Summer Tennis Party sponsored by Sterling Bank who was on site to provide kid friendly financial education for the kids (which they loved).

Tournaments were a new addition to the lineup and we held a Mixed Doubles event at St. Clair, a Junior Tournament at Lincoln Park and a Mixed Doubles Fundraiser at Dwight Davis Tennis Center in October. Congratulations to all of our 2023 champions!

In November we started our first year round indoor programming on Saturday mornings at The Cave in Belleville for less experienced juniors and on Sunday evenings at St. Clair Tennis Club for more experienced juniors.

Facilitating all these programs is a beefed up coaching staff consisting of over 15 coaches available to assist or lead programs.

We also helped facilitate the High School Girls Tennis Team by providing equipment and support and additionally provided tennis equipment to two other groups who operate with a similar mission. Our Tiny Tennis Library was kept fully stocked so that anybody who needed a tennis racket received one on the spot so they could play tennis and have a racket of their own.

Facilities - we received commitments from the USTA and East St. Louis Park District board for funding to resurface the Lincoln Park Courts in Spring 2024 to keep them looking and playing fantastic. In addition we received huge news this fall that the East St. Louis School District will be building new tennis courts and have met with the district and USTA to have input into the final design.

Our board members were very active this year and attended the USTA Impact Conference, US Open and The Missouri Valley USTA annual conference. We also took about 30 parents, students and board members to the USTA St. Louis annual awards dinner where we got to celebrate local players from across the St. Louis area.

All of the above took significant financial resources and our budget was the largest in our history with an expenditure of approximately \$45,000 at the end of November. We were able to fund this with some surplus we accumulated during covid and grants and private donations. The breakdown of donations is approximately 60% grants and 40% private donations.

Two of our board members received honors this year. Ms. Kim Hughes was named a Champion of Equality in a Ceremony with Billie Jean King at the US Open and Mr. Joe Lewis was named by the 45th Imperial Potentate of the Shriners and Masons to the commission for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

We could not do this without kids willing to learn, many donors and volunteers who helped make 2023 a success! We appreciate your support and look forward to continuing the mission in 2024.

— *Scott Stinson, December 14, 2023.*

Coco Gauff Wins the 2023 US Open



THE ONE AND ONLY USES MENTAL TOUGHNESS AND MATCH-LESS SKILL TO TRANSFORM THE AMERICAN HARDCOURT GAME.

From an early age, the elders of Coco Gauff identified her natural gifts and uncommon maturity, deeming her a student with unlimited potential. She was given specialized tutoring and pursued her goals with the older girls.

Coco applied herself diligently, and, as expected, excelled.

Gauff turned pro at just 14 years old. She's since been pushed and primed to take center stage in American women's tennis, the new answer to sisters Venus and Serena Williams—both Coco's idols growing up.

At 15 Gauff became the youngest player in Wimbledon's history to qualify for the main draw—and promptly upset five-time Wimbledon champion Venus en route to the fourth round. Gauff won her first WTA title months later in Linz, Austria.

In her first major final, the 2022 French Open, Gauff was schooled by Iga Swiatek, 6-1, 6-3. Gauff had entered the final without losing a set in her first six matches. But in the final, the American youngster produced 23 errors and Swiatek produced a masterclass.

Earlier this week in Flushing, Gauff reflected on that formative experience.

“I think I just didn't really believe that I had it in me,” she said. “This time around, I have been focusing more on myself and my expectations of myself. I really believe that now I have the maturity and ability to do it.”

Only weeks ago, though, the summer of 2023 looked to be a bummer. Gauff lost unexpectedly to the qualifier and former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin in the first round at Wimbledon.

“After Wimbledon, I wasn't expecting to do well in this hard-court season,” she said. “I was really sort of thinking for off-season and preparing for next year.”

Gauff added an old hand to her team, Brad Gilbert—who insisted on passing on not just strategies and analytics but Dad-rock playlists made up of bands that no 19-year-old wants to hear—and she added a new focus and aggression to her game. The outstanding 5-foot-9 athlete could still rely on her lightning speed to play defense and retrieve, as well as her naturally big serve, but Gauff began looking to punch harder with her groundstrokes, especially her forehand.

The results came quickly.

Suddenly, Gauff began to ace all of her tests. She won the WTA 500 title in Washington, D.C., defeating three Top 20 players. She then won the WTA 1000 event in Cincinnati, finally beating Swiatek in the semi—the American's first victory in eight tries against the No. 1. After capturing the title in Flushing on Saturday, Gauff has now won her last dozen matches, and 18 of her last 19.

And to cap it all off, Gauff has the crowning achievement: the US Open championship. Her first major title.

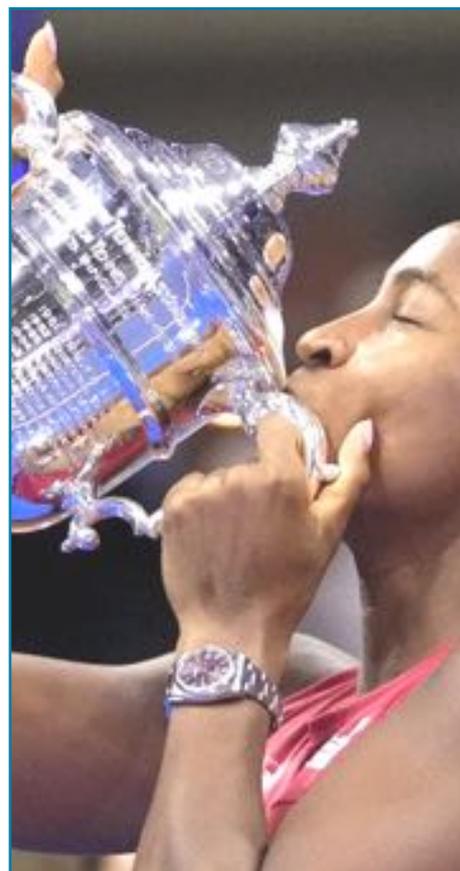
“I think people were putting a lot of pressure on me to win. I felt that at 15 I had to win a slam at 15,” Gauff said.

Yet she persisted.

Prior to playing the final, Gauff discussed the weight that comes with the territory of being labeled the Next Big Thing.

“I just learned how to cope with that better the more I have reached this level,” she continued. “You have some people who kind of already had to do it when they come on tour and some who need to learn.”

Gauff is obviously a dedicated learner. Home-schooled for 10 years, the world's sixth-ranked player earned her high school diploma on time, while working a full-time job.



BY NEIL SCHLECHT

“I think it's just putting my life into perspective,” said Gauff. “I realize in a way it's pressure, but it's not. There are people struggling to feed their families, people who don't know where their next meal is going to come from, people who have to pay their bills.”

“That's real pressure, that's real hardship, that's real life. I'm in a very privileged position. I'm getting paid to do what I love and getting support to do what I love. That's something that I don't take for granted.”

Before becoming the first American teenager to win the final in New York since Serena in 2001, Gauff's previous biggest moment in the white-hot spotlight was her much-hyped 2019 US Open match versus Naomi Osaka. The pressure was crippling.

“Honestly, that whole match I didn't enjoy at all,” she said earlier this week. “I think now I'm having way more fun now than I was three years ago.”

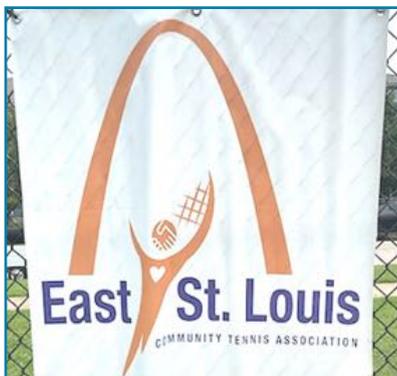
Celebrating the E.S.L.C.T.A. Youth Tennis Tournament

A LOOK BACK AT OUR FAMILY-ORIENTED SUMMER 2023 EVENTS INTRODUCING YOUNG PEOPLE TO TENNIS

These photos which follow are selected scenes from the East St. Louis Tennis Association's 1st Annual Youth Tennis Tournament, held in late July of this year. It is both our mission and our pleasure to introduce the game of Tennis to youngsters in our community, and to their families as well!



A SUMMER OF FUN



One of the Greatest Line Umpires Ever



PRO TENNIS LEGEND ALVIN "AL" PENELTON'S CONTRIBUTIONS ARE PERMANENTLY ENSHRINED ON THE GROUNDS OF THE U.S. OPEN



The late Alvin 'Al' Penelton is considered by many to be one of the greatest service line umpires of all time. Penelton loved many things: his family, tennis and helping the community.

Although a talented participant of many sports as a child, including cross country and gymnastics, and later basketball at Vashon High School in St. Louis, where he graduated in 1958, Penelton didn't take up tennis until 1974. He picked up tennis because he wished to remain active as he got older. He picked up the game quickly, winning scores of local tournaments, and during his career with Anheuser-Busch won the national company olympics three times. He even got to play on occasion with Arthur Ashe.

Penelton honed his game on many local courts ranging from Lincoln and Jones Parks to various St. Louis racquet clubs; he amassed eighty first-place trophies. His greatest moment came playing Arthur Ashe in an exhibition game.

As an employee at Anheuser-Busch St. Louis Brewery, he became not just their local tennis champ, but also a three-year champion of the company's Olympics a competition of all the breweries. It would be during a St. Louis match where someone suggested he consider becoming an umpire.

Penelton was influential in the United States Tennis Association (USTA) providing support to build state-of-the-art tennis courts in East St. Louis for area youth. "Without Alvin Penelton, there would not be new courts to introduce a new generation to tennis," said 40 Days of Nonviolence Coordinator Joe Lewis, Jr..

Al Penelton was an excellent tennis player and an exceptionally gifted official. Behind the scenes in the tennis world was where his light shined brightest. He won numerous awards and was honored by being placed in positions of trust his entire life.

Al Penelton passed on May 23, 2020 at 79 years of age.

Merits of Jeremyia Merrit



FORMER ESL TENNIS STANDOUT HONORED



MEET THE MVP: Jeremyia Merritt (right) won the 2023 Most Valuable Player award for Mississippi Valley State University Athletics



Kim Hughes Honored at the U.S. Open

FIFTEEN OTHER USTA SECTION HONOREES LAUDED AT THE INAUGURAL EVENT



FLUSHING, N.Y., Thursday, September 8, 2023 –The US Open’s inaugural ‘Champions of Equality’ event, a celebration of the fight for equality and the pioneering women who have led the way, saw formal honors bestowed on tennis’ foremost trailblazers at both the professional and grassroots levels ahead of Thursday night’s women’s singles semifinals.

The legendary Billie Jean King received the night’s Lifetime Achievement Award, and the iconic Venus Williams received the first US Open Billie Jean King Champion of Equality Award.

East St. Louis Community Tennis Association luminary Kim Hughes, alongside 15 other women nominated from the USTA Sections, were honored with their own Champion of Equality awards for their contributions at the grassroots level, put toward the ongoing effort of leveling the playing field for all.

A ‘Be Open’ event presented by Cadillac – who also sponsored the broadcast of the iconic Battle of the Sexes match in 1973 – Champions of Equality

featured a dynamic conversation with King and Williams, tennis’ trailblazers who have been at the forefront of the fight for equal pay, alongside Telva McGruder, Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at General Motors, and award-winning broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour, who moderated the event.

The full list of the USTA’s Section ‘Champions of Equality’ follows:

USTA Eastern
Lorraine Rohlsen-Alexander

USTA Florida
Dana Andrew’s

USTA Hawaii Pacific
Madeleine Dreith

USTA Intermountain
Glen Alex

USTA Mid-Atlantic
Brenda Gilmore

USTA Middle States
Nancy Wilkins

USTA Midwest
Joy Albi

USTA Missouri Valley
Kimberly Hughes-Gill

USTA New England
Judy Dixon

USTA Northern
Dr. Nicole Lavoie

USTA Northern California
Andrea Barnes

USTA Pacific Northwest
Shalini Hanstad

USTA Southern
Beth Hopkins

USTA Southern California
Doris Obih

USTA Texas
Kathleen Wu

USTA Southwest
Leslie Banks

Mix It Up for East St. Louis

OUR OCTOBER FUNDRAISER WAS A HUGE SUCCESS!



In October, we held our first fundraiser tournament at Dwight Davis Tennis Center in Forest Park. We had thirty-six participants that “Mixed” up the players so people played with new partners matched by rating level.

just enough for us to complete the tournament. It was a great success, raising over \$2,500 for our organization. Most importantly, we made a lot of new tennis friends!

The champions for our first ever Mix It Up Tournament were Art Staden and our own board member Johnnie Singleton.

After thinking we were going to be rained out, the rain held off



USTA Missouri Valley 2023 Awards Celebration

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2023..



On Saturday Nov.18, 2023 approximately 20-25 parents, coaches, and participants of The East St. Louis Community Tennis family attended The USTA Missouri Valley 2023 Award's Scholarship Dinner. The evening highlighted youth and young adult athletes on and off the tennis courts. The East St. Louis School District #189 provided bus transportation.

