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## No Longer a "Hit and Giggle" Sport

By Lou Fancher



Darren Cahill and Linda Davidson Photo provided

explains the seeming contradiction, emphasizing that training is infinitely social, but competition within a game, (unless it's doubles,) is a lonely activity. "In our area here, one thing that's nice is that we provide leagues for women with children. The times are convenient for them." He's talking about the Bay Area Ladies League, whose September to April season is appealing to women with children in school. He also mentions the inter-club leagues, which place the emphasis on doubles divisions, hold winners' luncheons, and tend to be more social, according to all the players.

A third reason the sport is booming-beyond satisfying women's thirst for competition and socialization-is health. "Playing a sport and getting exercise is a no-brainer," says Booth. "I'd much rather play and have fun than be on a treadmill."

Linda Davidson is both a participant and a former coach of boys' and girls' tennis teams at Miramonte High School. "Women's tennis is coming into its own because there are great athletes now," she says, echoing Orwig. When she began playing tennis 35 years ago, Davidson says her game was "hit and giggle." However, after just three months, she was "totally hooked." Last year, she co-captained the 2009 NorCal 4.0 USTA champion team, an indication of how far her game has developed. Still, she's a staunch supporter of all participants, saying, "You can be taken seriously at any level of play."

"The bottom line is that it's supposed to be fun," Booth says, driving in the final attraction to the game. With competitive local women's tennis thriving, she and her fellow team mates are permanently liberated from "hit and giggle." Because of King, Navratilova and thousands of recreational players, the phrase is now "ace, grin-and win."

When you think of women's liberation, you don't automatically think of tennis. But you should, because Christy Booth, Linda Davidson, Denise Acker, and a host of other hard-driving local women's tennis players were formed by the movement.

"Recreational tennis used to involve women who had never been in athletics," says Mark Orwig, the tennis pro at Moraga Country Club. He's been coaching Lamorinda players for 26 years and says the change is remarkable. "Now, we get athletes too. We're taking care of the full spectrum."

The spectrum encompasses everyone from casual, weekend players to participants in inter-club leagues, to members of the United States Tennis Association (USTA). "We have many options," says Acker, an Orinda resident who began playing 16 years ago. She credits USTA with raising the bar for adult teams, mentioning their ranking system and professional staffing. "Lots of working people play in USTA leagues. Their play times are right." The organization's evening practices and weekend tournaments suit women in the workforce.

Not only that, the USTA organizes community teams according to rank, so teams compete with opponents of similar skill. The extended post-season means the best teams from across the country play each other in the national championships. "The USTA is definitely most competitive," says Booth, who played in high school and trains with Orwig. "A lot of people don't like that level of play-it's intense." At 60, she welcomes the challenge. "It's as much my social life as it is for the competition," she says, bringing up a second reason women are pursuing the sport.

Orwig describes tennis as both "social" and "a lonely game." He



The team from left to right are: Julia Overs Bates, Sheila Eversole, Sharyn Lawrence, Susan Lundstrom, Linda Jones, Riki Sorenson, Linda Davidson, Miyuki Sheppard, Blair Paige, Marianne Lehman, front row, Sarah Loughlin, Ayako Schaham, Laura Pagano. Photo provided

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