



FLORIDA TENNIS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
U.S. TENNIS ASSOCIATION FLORIDA SECTION

Real life power, on and off the court
Tennis Plus Youth
Foundation
Mark, Florida, FL

FIRST SERVE, JIM COURIER HELP KIDS REACH NEXT LEVEL

INSIDE:

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FIRST SERVE: LEARNING MORE THAN TENNIS

At First Serve, kids learn more than how to hit a topspin forehand and slice backhand, and how to understand the convoluted scoring system of tennis. They learn life skills. Nine-year-old Breanne Dassent, a participant in First Serve's Tennis Plus program in Fort Lauderdale, attests to that.



Jim Courier hits with kids at First Serve's Tennis Plus program at Riverside Park in Fort Lauderdale.

Jim Martz

Publisher/Editor



"In First Serve I learned it's important to learn peoples' names because if you go up to someone and say, 'hey boy' or 'hey girl' that might make them feel bad. I think if everyone called people by their name, the world would be a better place."

First Serve is making the world a better place for many kids throughout the United States. This not-for-profit organization for children ages 7-17 provides tennis lessons, free homework help and teaches life skills such as managing emotions, dealing with peer pressure, healthy habits, resolving conflicts and college/vocational preparations.

"They learn how to be diligent in something and not just tennis but their home work," says Jim Courier, former No. 1 player in the world and national spokesman for First Serve. "This program truly has the power to change lives. It's a truly fantastic program and I'm proud to be part of it."

The genesis of the program goes back Miami's Moore Park, where in 1995 the Greater Miami Tennis Foundation received a grant from the USTA to establish a Local Excellence Training (LET) program that provided coaching, instruction and many other resources to enhance a player's potential. At the grand opening of the Ashe-Buchholz Tennis Center at Moore Park in 2001, USTA executive director Rick Ferman was impressed with the program and facility and sought to duplicate it nationwide.

Six months later the USTA created First Serve as an after-school safe haven for kids providing free access to computers, tutors, mentors and nutrition counselors while learning to play tennis. In 2002, with the support of Florida Governor Jeb Bush (honorary national chairman of

First Serve), the USTA launched 12 First Serve sites in Florida. The sites received more than \$1 million in state and federal grants, and Burger King contributed \$250,000, sparking contributions from several other corporations.

A year later, the USTA decided that First Serve reached far beyond the USTA mission to grow the game of tennis and with a commitment to continue its support turned over all legal rights of First Serve to an independent not-for-profit organization. Trey Buchholz, son of NASDAQ-100 Open founder and chairman Butch Buchholz, became First Serve's executive director and established the national office in Fort Lauderdale.

"First Serve is taking the lead in sports and is meeting the needs of today," says Trey. "Kids need extra help in school, especially when both parents are working. It takes the support of the community. This is not a numbers game but is making a difference in lives."

There are 27 First Serve chapters throughout the U.S., and Florida is blessed to have seven: Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Jacksonville, Orlando, St. Petersburg, Tallahassee and West Palm Beach. There are another 30 "chapters in development, among them Delray Beach and Miami.

"At first there was confusion with the National Junior Tennis League," Trey says of the program that has been around since the 1970s and focuses on tennis in underprivileged neighborhoods. "We differentiated ourselves by developing a curriculum."

That curriculum was developed through Stanford University, which

had developed a similar program for golf called First Tee.

"NJTL sites can become First Serve sites," says Butch Buchholz. "It takes it to the next level. The other part of this is giving back. These kids have to give something back to the community."

The Buchholz family has been giving back for many years. "It all goes back to Arthur Ashe and my brother, Cliff, and how tennis changed our lives and we want to help others," says Butch.

He's pleased to see the progress of First Serve. "Dick Gould [the famed former Stanford coach] has a chapter at Stanford. Mal Washington is doing a phenomenal job with his in Jacksonville. And in St. Pete, First Serve basically saved the Tennis Center. They're going to put in \$2.9 million for new courts and add a second story to the clubhouse.

"Jack Nicklaus had a great idea look at where they're building First Tee facilities and try to combine them with First Serve."

Adds Trey: "First Tee has been very helpful and a good model. But we don't have golf's problems; you can't play golf in the dark or in winter. The ability to teach life skills is easier to do on a court than a course. You don't have to find 40 acres in the middle of a city."

Trey would like to find a site in Fort Lauderdale to build a First Serve facility that would serve as a nationwide model and as the national headquarters. A First Serve program currently is run at Riverside Park just southwest of the downtown.

For more information on First Serve, call 954-332-2429 or visit www.firstserve.org.