

USTA Iowa President Brenton Kuchera's Annual Report

"I am happy to say that Iowa tennis is in a good place. By the numbers, our district continues to deliver quality programming to an increased population of people interested in learning more about tennis. I'd like to take this time to address a few more thoughts about the state of our sport and district.

As your president for the past two years, I've been happy to fulfill the role of encouragement during a time in which tennis is truly booming. In past president's reports, I have tried to call attention to the amazing individual efforts and communicate the appreciation that our Executive Board has for your contributions to this era of tennis growth. We've also created a framework within a strategic plan to be receptive and supportive of the programs that you are creating thanks to knowing your communities.

We have seen an increase in our CTAs becoming organized and learning how to become authentic 501(c3)s, which opens the door to more opportunities. Our committees are doing a lot of fantastic things to promote our sport. Communication with our Tennis on Campus captains has been energized, and Armando is providing awesome opportunities to work with them. Cindy has taken over as the Diversity and Inclusion Chair, and we've seen an increase in wheelchair tennis programming.

Lynda and Nathan offer a wealth of new perspective and knowledge to the Executive Board regarding cutting-edge technology for finance and providing accessibility to our sport. Astrid has exciting ideas about ways to improve our Junior Team Tennis offerings, and Steve continues to open communication between our officials and grow our officiating numbers.

Michael and our Awards committees are pushing some awesome initiatives with sportsmanship and nominations. Anne with adult competition has a fantastic opportunity to promote our seniors to get involved in order to qualify for the Senior Games that we are scheduled to host next year. Jennifer and Dana continue to provide communication to our captains allowing for a solid leagues program, and Mark puts in the work to improve communications with tournament directors and increase training opportunities.

I can confidently tell you the tennis industry is booming and the business of Iowa tennis is solid. There certainly are areas that we will continue to push and grow. Any program we implement for the first year or two will have elements that can be improved, and all feedback is appreciated. Our mission is to continue offering quality programming and seeking new and better ways of improving that programming; therefore, all voices matter.

I want to go a little further than just saying things are good right now because the fact is the future is exciting. I want to use this time to convey a message about the direction that I want to lead us in as we

look to the future; furthermore, because I love tennis, and I am an English teacher, prepare yourselves for an extended metaphor.

As of February 19, 2024, for the first time since 1973, there are no one-handed backhanders in the top 10 in the ATP, and on a separate but still difficult for me to wrap my head around tangent, Roger Federer remains retired. Don't worry; I'll let that sink in. To some, this may seem like obscure random facts, but I feel these two simple statements communicate an important message about the future of tennis. Tennis is a sport with a rich and deep history and a sport of tradition.. Wimbledon has been played since 1877, and King Henry VIII is said to have been a fan of the sport all the way back in the 16th century. Wood rackets, serve and volley, and now, the one-handed backhand may have come and gone. While some of these trends may return to glory like sabering did for a while, and the drop shot seems to be currently doing, change is an inevitable fact of nature. Yet, when one era leaves, a new one begins.

Some might mistake the history and tradition in our sport as a sign that tennis is closed minded, outdated, and destined to fade away; however, tennis, especially U.S. tennis, has been a leader in change in many positive ways within the world of sports. That willingness to lead into change while fondly remembering and building onto our past is why we have a bright future. We have Billie Jean King and the Battle of the Sexes promoting gender equality. We have Arthur Ashe, Althea Gibson, Serena Williams, Coco Gauff, Frances Tiafoe, Madison Keys, and Ben Shelton, to just name a few players breaking racial barriers and challenging stereotypes. The USTA is a supporter of LGBTQ+ inclusion, with stars like Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova being influential figures and advocates within our sport. The USTA is at the forefront of embracing technological innovations in tennis, such as the introduction of Hawk-Eye technology, the use of video screens for player challenges, and advancements in tennis rankings like the WTN. For a sport as rooted in tradition as tennis, we have been often on the right side of history regarding change and progressive movements.

Hindsight is a beautiful thing, and we can and should look with pride upon our history. Times are good right now, but we must continue to adapt and stay on the right side of that resilience through change. UTR, Pickleball, and many other challenges that may shake up the status quo in our future await us. How will we advocate and respond to change? Nothing stays the same; Roger Federer is retired and there are no one-handed backhanders in the top 10 of the ATP. Yet, tennis will survive; it is currently booming, and its best days are still ahead of us.

Our Iowa district will certainly face adversities in the future; I want to ensure that we take actions to allow our best days to be ahead of us as well. The individual efforts that many of us put towards our passion for this sport has put us at an advantage; if we are to continue to be successful, we must approach the future like a doubles team and not just extraordinary singles players. The success of our district depends on the

success of all of our committees and tennis providers. All of our tennis providers, schools, parks, clubs, and Community associations are in this mission together.

My vision for the future is to lead the ITA into becoming an amazing doubles partner to these shared ventures. An effective doubles team supports one another and has clear communication. Our Executive Board will continue to work as liaisons with committees. We also will need to lean on our chairs at times to effectively smash a lob that presents itself, like the Junior Team Tennis and upcoming Senior games. I want to celebrate with each other in a loud emphatic “Vamos!” when we put those winners away. Open, transparent communication is a point I want to emphasize these next two years. As hand signals communicate a clear strategy before a point, I want to continue to refine our strategic plan to put us in the best place for success.

I want to work to bring committee members to your committees so that no one feels like they are playing singles. I want to make it a point that our bylaws are easily accessible and that expectations are clear to the public and volunteers of how we can assist each other. I want to embrace reflective practices with technology and data like a doubles team will analyze their placement on the court after a match. The future is bright, especially when we have partners that support us. Our section, our chairs, our Executive Board, we will continue swinging and taking our shot whatever the future brings.

As a team, we will tackle any hardships that present themselves, and at the end of the day, we will be able to look back with hindsight on our contributions to the mission of promoting tennis. We will be able to take pride in those contributions knowing that we made the most of our time, that we never settled but strove for better days to come so that tennis will continue to be accessible and enjoyed for generations to come. I look forward to hearing the exciting work of our committees.”

Brenton Kuchera
USTA Iowa President