

2011 USTA Northern California Tennis Hall of Fame Carolyn Nichols



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Senior player Carolyn Nichols lives by the adage that the longer you play tennis the better you get. Originally from a small farm in Fresno, Nichols now represents the USTA around the world as a top senior tennis player, traveling to locales like New Zealand, Spain and South Africa. Nichols, who finished 2010 ranked No. 1 in the United States in 55 and over for singles, and No. 4 for doubles, says she found her niche as a senior player, "I'm a counterpuncher so I've had a better time in Seniors; the goal in senior tennis is simply to improve and stay healthy while you're having fun playing," Nichols explains.

The daughter of NorCal Hall of Famer and top ranked senior player Graydon Nichols, Carolyn, along with her brother and sister, was exposed to tennis at an early age, "Dad and mom played; my father is an engineer and built a court on our farm in Fresno," she says. Participating on a tennis team in high school was a turning point, "I didn't do any sports before that but I fell in love with tennis," Nichols says. "I wasn't very good at first, but I just kept hitting lots and lots of balls."

After attending Stanford University, and earning a law degree from the University of the Pacific, Nichols started taking tennis lessons every weekend. "I just kept playing and got better; there are no short cuts in tennis, you just have to work hard," she explains. She credits her ability to win matches to her days playing junior tournaments in Northern California.

Nichols has been nationally ranked since 1989 and ranked in sections since 1972. She reached the No. 1 Open ranking spot in 2006, has earned 23 gold balls and has been a member of 14 Cup teams, nine of which won its Cup, two of which finished second and two that finished third. Nichols was captain of five of those teams and has traveled internationally with Cup teams to Spain, South Africa, Mexico and New Zealand, among other places.

In 2010 alone, along with finishing the year ranked No. 1 in the United States in 55 and over for singles, and No. 4 for doubles, she competed in 107 tournament matches. Internationally Nichols claimed the No. 2 spot in 55 singles. She has also captured 21 National Championships, including the 2010 55 and over hard and clay court championships, and the 80+ Father-Daughter hard court doubles championship, an event both she and her father have greatly enjoyed playing over the years. "The Father-Daughter tournament was very memorable; dad is great to play with," Nichols says.

Nichols has also made far-reaching contributions to senior tennis off the court; she is a current board member and past president of the National Senior Women's Tennis Association and a USTA member of ITF Seniors Committee. Current USTA national committees include Chairing the Senior International Competition Committee and member of International Committee and Adult/Senior Competition Committee. NorCal committee memberships have included the Adult Tournament Committee and the Intersectional Teams committee.

Nichols has also been recognized for her contributions to the game with various service and sportsmanship awards, including the USTA Service Bowl Winner in 2006, NorCal Player of the Year for 2000 and 2002, the 2007 Betty Gray Washington Sportsmanship Award, and in 2008 the NorCal Service to Tennis Award, SoCal Tennis Assn Media Award, the Lamita Jabour Sportswoman Award and the 2010 USTA Seniors' Service award.