

Hunter Delatour, Jr. 1917-2013

by Nancy Gill McShea

Call him "Mr. Tennis." Read his list of accomplishments, from his first involvement as a USLTA umpire in 1935 to the present day, and you'll see why.

An active player all his life, Hunter Delatour first played tennis in the late 1920s on Long Island, where he nurtured his game on the Great Neck High School tennis team and local Eastern tournaments. He went on to play for the Princeton tennis team under famous coach Mercer Beasley. During those formative years, Hunter also managed the Twilight Park Tennis Club in Haines Falls, N.Y., where his parents spent their summer months.

"Twilight was one of the old line, well-respected USLTA member clubs," he said. "It was noted for an annual tournament which I ran during my tenure. Bill Tilden had played it, and while I was there Gardar Mulloy was a regular participant. It was during this period that I would hold the proxy and represent the club at the USLTA Annual Meeting, which was held each year at the Vanderbilt Hotel in New York."

In the 57 years that have elapsed since he left Princeton in 1938, Hunter has managed to combine two rewarding careers-as a high profile volunteer in tennis administration and as an innovative leader in his own optical business. He manufactures and markets products designed to preserve and improve eyesight, and serves on the Northern California Society to prevent blindness. During the war years he took a brief detour into another worthy endeavor. From 1941 to 1946, he served in the U.S. Navy, entering as an Ensign and retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Commander. He was honored by the British Government as a Member of the Order of the British Empire-"an honor I cherish," he said-and was also awarded a commendation ribbon by the Secretary of the Navy. While serving in Washington, he met his wife, Eugenie, who was working in the British Embassy. They married in 1944 and later returned to civilian life, spending the next 18 years on Long Island's North Shore.

In 1962, Hunter's good friend and Princeton classmate, Alastair Martin, recruited him to serve on the Eastern Lawn Tennis Association Board of Directors as a delegate from Long Island. From that point on, he maintained a steady involvement and climb on the administrative side of the sport, all the way to the USTA presidency in 1983-'84.

"Hunter has always had an instinct for knowing what is best for tennis", Alistair Martin said recently. "And perhaps his greatest contribution to the game has been his subtle ability to get officials to accept his views. He has always had great respect for good sportsmanship and has championed a liberal view toward Open competition-more tennis for more people."

In 1966, Hunter and Eugenie, who have three grown daughters-Anne, Debbie, and Susie-moved to Portola Valley, California. He was elected to the Board of the Northern California Tennis Association and in 1972-73 served as the board president. In 1975 he was elected secretary of the USLTA, followed by two-year terms as second vice president, first vice president and president. His two years as immediate past president culminated 12 years of service on the USTA Board of Directors. He has also served as president of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, vice president of the International Tennis Federation and in many capacities on various USTA committees.

"Being involved in tennis has resulted in our having traveled to all corners of the earth to be with people interested in the game...We can go anywhere in the world a find a fellow tennis player who is already a friend, or who will be, once the tennis relationship is cemented," Hunter Delatour said. "I have enjoyed doing all I could to encourage grass-roots tennis at all levels. During my term as USTA president, the schools program was inaugurated. The National Junior Tennis League (NJTL) and the USTA merged, and the USTA formed a closer relationship with the International Tennis Hall of Fame and collegiate tennis."

The recent unrest between labor and management in professional baseball and hockey-and tennis-reminds us that the art of merging ideas among any sport's diverse organizations to promote growth and harmony can be a complex challenge. And tennis leaders from New York to California regard Hunter Delatour, Jr., as one of the great diplomats in that effort for tennis.

"Hunter has diffused much of the acrimony that is present at the tennis bargaining tables," according to one source who reflects the consensus. "His image is one of a gentleman and a conciliator."

Tennis Highlights

USTA Board of Directors (1975-1986): Secretary, Second Vice President, First Vice President, President and Immediate Past President.

USTA Committees (1972 to the present): Men's Ranking, Management and Executive Committees, Scholarship Awards, Olympic Pan-Am, Constitution & Rules, Credentials, U.S. Open, Tennis Rules, Ranking Committees' general chairman, Davis Cup, Olympic, USTA/International Tennis Hall of Fame chairman, Budget & Finance, Federation Cup, Governance & Planning.

Member Committee of Management, Vice President, Honorary Life Counselor, Life Trustee, International Tennis Foundation; Director National Tennis Foundation/Hall of Fame; President, International Tennis Hall of Fame; President, Northern California Tennis Association; elected to Northern California Tennis Hall of Fame; honorary member, All England lawn Tennis & Croquet Club; member, International Lawn Tennis Club of USA; honorary member, International Lawn Tennis Clubs-Great Britain, France, Sweden, South Africa, Australia, India, New Zealand, Canada, Spain, Japan and Israel.