

2014 USTA Northern California Tennis Hall of Fame John Hubbell



John Hubbell



Hubbell considers himself an "on-court guy".

In 1975, after John Hubbell received a full tennis scholarship to Cal Berkeley, his dad built a tennis court at their home.

"I've been teaching on it ever since they built it," said Hubbell, now 58.

John Hubbell has gained a national reputation as one of the top teaching pros in the business, achieving success with students at the junior, collegiate and professional levels. Hubbell's parents, avid players, helped nurture his love of the game.

"Mom, an avid player, passed away two years ago," Hubbell said. "I still go over to Dad's house every Friday to teach, and always fit in a hit with Dad, who is 87. He still loves to play."

Hubbell brings the passion for coaching and enthusiasm for the game to his work at Bay Club Redwood Shores, where he has been head pro and now serves as director of tennis.

"If there's an hour of the day where a court is open, I'll never say no" to coaching a player, Hubbell said.

More than three decades ago, that same passion brought him to San Jose State. Only 24, he took a job for a salary then "in the four figures -- probably the reason I got the job" -- and became the youngest Division I coach in the country.

"I would have paid to take it," Hubbell said. "It was my dream job to coach college tennis."

He was at SJSU for 17 years and guided the team to 14 winning seasons. Recruiting wasn't always easy, competing against other big West Coast programs like Stanford, Cal Berkeley, USC and UCLA. Yet, seven of his players would advance to the pro circuit.

"That was part of what I loved," Hubbell recalled. "A lot of these guys were late bloomers, really gung-ho, really loved tennis. Willing to do anything. Pretty scrappy."

One of his SJSU players, Brandon Coupe, nominated Hubbell for the USTA NorCal Hall of Fame. Coupe was an All-American at San Jose State and played nine years on the ATP tour, advancing to the quarterfinals in doubles at the U.S. Open in 2002. Currently he is an assistant coach at Stanford.

"I was lucky enough to play for 'Hubbs' at SJSU in the early '90s," Coupe wrote. "Without question he is the most instrumental coach I have ever worked with and none of my achievements and success in tennis would have been possible

without his coaching and guidance. To me, John Hubbell embodies what a COACH is; a technician, strategist, motivator and mentor."

Hubbell work gained notice. In 1981, he was enlisted as a coach for the USTA Junior Davis Cup team, working with renowned captain Steve Stefanki. Hubbell himself would captain the team from 1985-88.

Hubbell has been sought out by USTA for high-performance player development ever since, identifying, selecting and coaching top prospects. He has frequently traveled to national and international destinations including coaching the men's teams at the 1986 Goodwill Games and the 1987 Pan American games, and taking teams to ITF championships.

The Junior Davis Cup assignment allowed Hubbell to coach future pros including Brad Gilbert, Ricky Leach, Patrick McEnroe, Paul Annacone, MaliVai Washington, Matt Anger and Jim Grabb.

Gilbert, in a testimonial supporting Hubbell's Hall of Fame nomination, called Hubbell "an excellent coach ... an easy-going guy with great skills at communicating and teaching, and most of all really knows the game. Class guy."

Hubbell has served as personal coach to a long list of high-level players. Just a few examples: Robin White won U.S. Open championships in women's and mixed doubles and rose to World No. 15 in singles. Grabb achieved great success in doubles, rising to World No. 1 in 1990 and winning two Grand Slam titles. Jeff Tarango, Marianne Werdel and Lilia Osterloh cracked the Top 50 in singles on the pro tours. Lindsay Burdette, Sandra Birch and Linda Gates won NCAA championships, and Elizabeth Plotkin and Caroline Doyle have won national junior titles.

For Hubbell, tennis has always been a place to find fun and joy. As a kid, he would hit at Foothills Club where renowned amateur champion Nick Carter was holding court. "He made tennis fun, told stories of Bill Tilden, Pancho Gonzalez, Bobby Riggs. I'd ride my bike over there every day after school."

Hubbell played at Foothill College for legendary coaches Tom Chivington, then went to Cal Berkeley and played for Bill Wright. The opportunity to observe those men, and later to work with the likes of Stefanki, Robert Lansdorp, Tom Stow, Jose Higuera and Dick Gould, would prove instrumental in shaping Hubbell's coaching career.

In a testimonial, Gould said of Hubbell: "I have watched him on court with juniors, college players and touring pros, and I am always impressed with his enthusiasm, work ethic and technical knowledge."

As a coach, Hubbell said he tries to emphasize the positive. "Can you give me five things you did well?" he would ask his students. "Did you show up? ... And then -- what can we do to improve?"

Hubbell has worked to be a consummate professional, sought as a presenter at coaching conferences and hosting tournaments and charity events.

Yet, his biggest passion continues to be working hands-on with students.

"I'm an on-court guy," Hubbell said. "Happiest time in my life is when I have big basket of really good tennis balls, and a player or two on the other side of the net with a really good attitude who wants to get better."