

2008 USTA Northern California Tennis Hall of Fame Lynne Rolley



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From Orinda to the world stage: "Coaching is What I Do"

"This award embraces my whole career and my family. It is the best honor I could possibly have."

When Lynne Abbes was growing up in Orinda in the late fifties there were really only two sports for girls. Her five sisters chose the first sport, swimming. Lynne chose the second, tennis. Kevin Merrick, at Orinda Country Club, was her first teacher. According to Lynne he was a pied piper kind of pro who attracted a loyal and committed group of juniors from the community. "I loved tennis so much that from the time I was nine years old, I don't remember missing a day playing tennis, unless I was sick," said Lynne. Fortunately for Lynne, her mother was an avid player having grown up on San Francisco's Golden Gate Park courts, and her father, from New York, also played well. (editor's note: Lynne's father Ernest served as president of USTA Northern California.)

Lynne started playing tournaments the next year, becoming the No. 2 ranked junior in the U.S., seemingly always behind Peaches Barkowitz. "I played national tournaments until 1968, when my friends all joined the tour and I got married to Mike Rolley," recalls Lynne. When her new husband was stationed in Germany for a couple of years she taught tennis and, upon their return to the Bay Area in 1970, was hired to be the men's tennis coach at St. Mary's College in Moraga, a first time a women had coached a men's NCAA team. "Right after I took the St. Mary's job I was flown to New York to appear on the TV show, 'What's My Line,'" said Lynne. "No one guessed my profession!"

After St. Mary's Lynne started a string of jobs that would lead her to the big time. She coached a group of exceptional juniors, including four pros Mike Bauer, Garth Hayes and Ken Derr. She was also hired as coach of the Oakland Aces, a World Team Tennis franchise owned by the Oakland A's. In 1988, she was recruited by Arthur Ashe (Mike Bauer was his Davis Cup hitting partner) and the then-president of the USTA Bumpy Fraser to start a national player development program in Key Biscayne. "I was one of four coaches – Tom Gullikson, Benny Sims and Nick Saviano –all reporting to Stan Smith," said Lynne. Several more USTA jobs followed and Lynne became head of all women's tennis.

"There's a real difference between coaching men and women, said Lynne. With women it's not always about the tennis, it's about developing the life of a young female. They are typically younger than the men and need more of a network for continuity and stability." Among others, Lynne has coached Lindsey Davenport, Chanda Rubin and Jennifer Capriati. A high point in Lynne's career came when she was seated in Lindsey's box when she won the US Open.

She says she gets just as much satisfaction from watching her daughter Ashlie, a newlywed, grow and develop, and teaching the members of the Berkeley Tennis Club, where she is director of tennis. "Tennis is my life, coaching is what I do. I've been a tennis person forever and I can't imagine doing anything else. I enjoy teaching and coaching recreational players just as much as touring pros. When people ask me if I miss playing tennis I tell them that watching them improve their games is my greatest joy."

