

## 2012 USTA Northern California Tennis Hall of Fame Martha Downing



**Martha Downing**

Senior player Martha Downing has been a teaching pro and director at tennis clubs in Sacramento for over 35 years, is a regular on the international cup teams, holds 27 Gold Balls, donates her time to charity tournaments and has been named USTA NorCal Senior Player of the Year four different times.

Martha was first introduced to tennis when she was nine years old. She explains, "My family moved next to a park in Decatur, Illinois – the only park in the area that had cloth nets. My two older sisters and I could walk over and participate in the free lessons that were being offered."

Martha reached a junior ranking of 15 in Girl's 16s and 28 in Girl's 18s, but no high school team meant that she had to find alternative opportunities to play competitively. "I mostly played on my own. I was able to travel on intersectional teams. At the time there was only one national junior tournament and luckily for me it was in Illinois," she says.

Wanting warmer weather so that she could play tennis more often, Martha attended college at Stanford University in 1967. "I had never been west of Mississippi before but California had a lure to it," she says. Though different from the collegiate competitive women's tennis programs that are available today, Martha was a prominent figure on the Stanford women's tennis team, remaining within the top 3 throughout her time at the university.

After college Martha decided to turn her passion into a career. She learned how to teach tennis through the recreational programs that at the time were run by esteemed NorCal coaches Dick Gould and Tom Chivington. Her first teaching position was as the Tennis Director at the Castilleja School in Palo Alto. From there Martha relocated to Sacramento to take the position of Assistant Pro at Del Norte Swim & Tennis Club. Eight years later she became the Tennis Director at Arden Hills Swim & Tennis Club and then she was hired as the Tennis Director at Millennium Sports Club El Dorado, where she remained for 19 years.

Martha's senior NorCal record would make any competitive player envious; she has reached an Open #1 ranking in singles seven times and three times in doubles. Her USPTA rankings have been just as impressive, reaching the #1 ranking in doubles five different times, once in singles and she was named USTA NorCal player of the year four times. Her 27 Gold Balls consisted of 12 singles wins and 15 doubles. Playing in the senior 60s in 2009 she reached the #1 world ranking and earned seven Gold Balls in that one year alone.

Additionally, Martha has played on six Cup teams, including the Margaret Court Cup, Maureen Connolly cup and the Alice Marble Cup. The U.S. won the championship five of the six times that she participated on the team.

Martha has received numerous accolades for her outstanding accomplishments, career and playing record, including awards from USTA NorCal, USPTA, IMG, the Women's Sports Foundation and the Sacramento Tennis Hall of Fame, where she was inducted in 2009.

Despite her busy schedule, Martha always made time to give back to the sport that she loved by regularly donating her time to benefit tournaments and worthy causes.

"I feel very fortunate that my hobby became my career. I always enjoyed going to work. I was thrilled to develop a passion for tennis in my students," says Martha. "I was even more excited to be involved in over 55 benefit tournaments in my career. It was just an extra bonus that I could still compete and win some gold balls."