



Tennis is a worldwide sport, and Steve Stefanki followed it around the globe in search of its hidden secrets. His travels inspired his focus on finding a balanced approach, understanding the mind, body and spirit connection to sports performance, and developing fundamentals for success from a process-oriented rather than a goal-oriented system of teaching.

One of eight kids, Steve's father moved the family from Illinois to Northern California to provide an opportunity for his children to go to college through the California Junior College system. The Stefanki family moved to Los Altos in 1964, while the parents took a year to build a house for the family in Los Altos Hills. At 14, Steve's mom, Dorothy, signed Steve and his 13-year-old brother John up for classes at the Los Altos High courts as an activity to get the kids out of the house. The sport would grow on Steve, playing on the tennis team in his junior and senior years at Mountain View's St. Francis High School. While in high school, he had help from Roger Johnson at St. Francis and Dick Gould at Foothill College.

Attending Foothill Junior College, Steve was coached by Tom Chivington who took over for his friend Dick Gould, who moved on to Stanford University. Having worked with Gould and Chivington, Steve was exposed to the positive influences that coaches could have on a player. Steve won the California State Junior College Singles title in 1970 for Foothill Junior College. He then went on to play No. 1 singles and doubles for UC Berkeley under Coach Kevin Merrick.



During college, Steve competed domestically playing amateur events. He won events in Northern California, Illinois, Alabama, Minnesota, and New York. Steve traveled with his doubles partner, Bob Siska, who had played at Wimbledon, French Open, and Forest Hills. For Steve, playing those tournaments were dreams back then. He then traveled internationally to play small professional tennis events where he won tournaments in Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey in 1973 alone. Steve held the NorCal top ranking in Men's 35 singles in 1985. He won several Open and Men's 35 doubles events with his long time friend, Mark Elliott.

His coaching career began in 1969, helping Mark Elliott with Los Altos Recreation classes. In 1972, he helped Barb Hultgren start the Out Reach Mid Peninsula Tennis Patrons tennis clinics in East Palo Alto. His old coaches, Chivington and Gould, hired Steve for their recreational tennis programs on the Peninsula.

In 1973, Steve went to teach tennis in foreign countries through the State Department. Steve traveled with his then-girlfriend, Lee Baldwin, a cultural anthropology student from UCLA. She would be instrumental in explaining and working through all the cultural differences Steve would encounter on that trip.

Traveling 11 months through Vietnam, Thailand, Israel, the Samoas, Sri Lanka, and other countries their exposure to other cultures opened Steve and Lee's eyes to becoming citizens of the world. Steve found tennis scholarships for an Israeli player, Yaer Wertheimer, at UC Berkeley and a Sri Lankan player, Suresh Sivaragham, at Pepperdine University.

Steve taught at Ladera Oaks in Portola Valley from 1974-1977, but soon found himself in need of help with his teaching. Steve found Tom Stow, one of the top coaches from the 1940s, to help. Tom had developed top players like Don Budge, Margaret Osborne Dupont, and Sarah Palfrey, who won several individual Grand Slam titles. Tom had developed an instruction style of tennis to include the importance of building solid fundamentals through a wide range of movement understandings. He took from dance, boxing, golf, baseball batting, even using an axe and tools like hammers and sickles to demonstrate power and grace. His students all had incorporated a fluid still balance while moving across the entire court. His teachings fascinated Steve, not only as a coach but also as a disciplined teacher.



Stow retired at Silverado Country Club in Napa after he had developed Silverado into one of the West Coast's top tennis facilities during the late 1960s. Silverado had been sold and he no longer had a court to teach on. Northern California players such as Jeff Borowiak, Brent Abel, Doug King, Jeff Arons, John Hubbell, Rusty Cohan, and even Steve's brother Larry were getting help from Tom during those days on high school courts. In 1979, Steve felt strongly that Stow's instruction was vital to Northern California teachers, so at the urging of Lee, now Steve's wife, the two moved to Napa from the Mid-Peninsula and purchased a two-and-a-half acre ranch in Napa. Steve hired Tom's friend, Gene Edwards, to build one of the most scenic teaching courts in Northern California on the ranch. Stow was able to teach there until he died in 1984. After those formative years with Tom, Steve decided to continue his search for teaching and learning. He continued to seek out master teachers in other fields and he developed his own unique tennis teaching style from studies in the martial arts, dance and the healing arts.

Steve was honored to coach the USTA Junior Davis Cup Team from 1980-1985. He selected a group of players from the United States college ranks to compete on the ATP Tour in preparation for future Davis Cup play for the United States teams.

After coaching the United States Pan American Games tennis team in Caracas, Venezuela in 1983, where team USA tennis players won the gold medal in both singles and doubles, Steve was selected by the USTA to coach the United States tennis team in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Steve continued spreading his philosophies of the game of tennis until the 1990's, when he went into semi retirement. Before stepping away from the game, he wrote several articles and produced a video on his approach to tennis and has been a guest speaker and instructor at clubs, camps, conventions and campuses across the nation. Over the years, he has helped many players and teachers with their careers, expanding their understanding and knowledge of the game.