

THE MAINWALL SPECTATOR

SEPTEMBER 2009

PRO TIP:

Use the force.... You are receiving and need to beat a Hazard chase. Your opponent serves a deep railroad tight to the wall and you have no angle to hit the galleries. Try hitting the ball hard below the bottom left hand corner of the Dedans. The ball will blast out along the mainwall somewhere between the last and second gallery, beating the chase. You may even hit the Dedans by accident... you hero you!!!

COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT:

Bob Forbes

PROFESSIONALS:

Ivan Ronaldson

Phil Shannon

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Temple Grassi

Ryan Carey

Christine Donovan

Pat Homer

Steve Hufford

Kim Jaske

Jason Hiram

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPT. 20:

-Al & Ros in DC Mix n match (all welcome).

-Vietnese National Championship (Vu Hoang v. Michael Do).

OCT. 2-4:

US 50's — (ages 50 and up) Boston (ask pros for info)

OCT. 9-12:

Lieb Cup (Us Junior Doubles) - Newport.

OCT. 10:

Prince's Court v. Philadelphia (at Philadelphia). All handicaps welcome; contact Ivan for details.

OCT. 15:

Start of season party. New leagues will be started, and

draws will be made for the club tournaments.

NOV. 13-15

US Ladies Open —Newport

Calhoun Witham (Doubles)—Aiken

NOV. 20-22:

Jimmy Dunn (Doubles) — Philadelphia)

DEC. 4-6:

National Open (Singles)—Boston

DEC. 11-13

Whitney Cup (Team Doubles)—NY

DEC. 11:

USCTA Annual Awards Dinner & Auction—NY



MICHEL DO PHOTOGRAPHY

Peter Bender wants to grind your bones to make his bread.

VU HOANG VICTORIOUS AT WINSTEAD CUP

The annual club handicap tournament ended September 3rd with a closely-fought final. Playing were Jason Hiram and Vu Hoang.

Hiram's handicap had recently been lowered after his resounding victory at the Pell Cup (see pg. 2), and the differential was

only half owe-fifteen. The dedans and mainwall gallery were crowded with spectators from among the Prince's Court faithful.

The match went off to a slow start, but by the third game both Hiram and Hoang were playing in good form. They split

the first two sets, then fought tooth-and-nail over the third.

The third set reached 5-5, and the score in the last game was a remarkable 40-all—match point for both players! Vu slammed a forehand into the grill to take the match, and was presented the trophy by David Winstead.

PRINCE'S COURT AT THE PELL CUP

Prince's Court put up a strong showing at the Pell Cup in Newport this August, fielding seven players: Phil Shannon and Ryan Carey (A division), Jake McCray (B division), and Jason Hiram, Greg Lysko, Jericho Seguin, and Vernon Cassin (D division).

Shannon and Carey were playing their first tournament together, but seemed a natural fit, Shannon taking the back court while Ryan guarded the galleries. Shannon's natural athleticism allowed him to get nearly everything in the back half of the court, while Ryan's lightning-quick volley returned gallery shots with punishing strikes at the tambour.

Shannon and Carey played tenacious tennis and dominated the service side for most of their matches, in-

cluding one 6/5, 5/6, 6/5 match—widely acclaimed as the best spectator event of the tournament.

Despite a strong field of A-division players from England, Shannon and Carey made it to the finals of the A division, where they lost in two close sets.

Jake McCray, newly promoted to the B-division and without his regular partner, made a strong showing but had three tough matches. We confidently expect to see him in the A division before long.

In the D division, Jason Hiram and Greg Lysko played well below their handicaps, raising cheers from Prince's court members and mutters from the Newport dedans. They won their three qualifying matches handily and progressed to the finals.

Seguin and Cassin had a tough first match but pulled through: 2/6, 6/5, 6/5. Their remaining matches were easier, and they ended up playing Hiram/Lysko for the D Division final. Hiram and Lysko proved too much for them, and won the match in two sets—6/2, 6/5.

Also representing Prince's Court was Fred Prince, a part-time Newport resident, who watched several matches from the upper gallery.

Play by the Prince's Court players was uniformly excellent, and one player, Hiram, saw his handicap drop several points as a result of his victory at the Pell.

Prince's Court also had the distinction of fielding more players at the Pell than any club other than Newport



Prince's Court D-Division Finalists

“a pilgrimage to Georgian Court.”

PRINCE'S COURT VISITS LAKEWOOD

On August 29th, members of Prince's Court joined with several Boston players to take a pilgrimage to Georgian Court, home court of Jay Gould.

The trip was organized by Dave Sterrett and Ken Forton. Prince's Court members included Dave Sterrett, Jake McCray, Steve Chap-

man, Pat Homer, and Vern Cassin. From Boston were Ken and Jessica Forton, Larry McCray, and Arthur Drane.

Play began at 9 a.m., and continued without pause until almost 6 p.m. The play was in “Mix and Match” style, with Boston and Washington players intermingling

as convenient.

Conditions at the court were excellent, with the glare from the skylights mitigated by stormy skies.

Plans are in the works for future Lakewood events, including a possible D.C./Boston tournament. More to follow as events develop.

COURT TENNIS HISTORY: THE INVENTION OF THE RAILROAD

By Vernon Cassin

A spectator at a modern court tennis match, seeing the constant use of the railroad service, might be pardoned for thinking that the service had grown up with the game—that it had been invented by bare-palmed monks as they batted cloth-filled balls along the roofs of their monastery outbuildings.

In fact, the railroad was invented in the United States, by an American player named Richard Sears.

Sears had been a lawn tennis player in a former life—in fact, he had been the first lawn tennis champion of the United States (1881-1887). In 1889, Sears retired from lawn tennis and took up court tennis.

His talent was apparently versatile. When the first US court tennis championship took place in 1892, Sears won that as well. He was thus America's first champion of both lawn tennis and court tennis.

From lawn tennis, Sears brought his idiosyncratic overhead twist serve—the first railroad. Unlike the fast serve of today's champions, it was served slowly, with maximum spin. Its purpose was to cramp the receiver and cut him off from the galleries. The ball almost always hit the floor first, rather than the back wall.

Sears' unconventional serve fit in well with the brash Bostonian style taught by America's first professional, Tom Pettitt. Whereas New York players largely adopted the classical style, Pettitt advocated a brasher approach to the game: "Get the ball over; when in difficulty play for a winning opening or for the nick, and above all keep on the alert and hustle."

Following this advice, Boston players put business before grace, even tucking their trousers into their socks to prevent the balls from hitting them.

Eustace Miles, the great English player, described

the state of play in 1899:

"The average Bostonian... usually keeps the head of his racquet below the level of his wrist... he puts on little cut, but often some twist, as he gets his racquet below and behind the ball; he pays little attention to the sideway position of his body, so that he uses his wrist rather than his shoulder and his body muscles; but he hits hard, especially for the openings and for the length of the court. He tries to 'dodge' his opponent by masking his stroke, and he aims at getting everything over and rushing about rapidly in any direction. The Boston service is in keeping with the stroke; it is a fast overhead smash and keeps the opponent on the run."

Pettitt himself is sometimes credited as the author of the railroad, and it is true that, but for his coaching, it might not have become prevalent.

Certainly he was the first player to introduce the railroad to England.

Pettitt produced the serve in a 1898 world championship match against Peter Latham, producing much consternation in the dedans. The serve did not, however, avail him much. After a few missed returns, Latham figured out the serve and went on to win 7 sets to 0.

Under the coaching of Pettitt, Boston players began experimenting with more powerful railroad serves. The first truly successful hard railroad was developed not long after. Its inventor was Bostonian Joshua Crane, US champion from 1901 through 1904. Crane's primary service was a powerful railroad. It so dominated his game that Noel, in his history of tennis, claimed that "All his strokes are formed as replies or attacks to some likely outcome of the overhead railroad."

Crane would likely have remained US champion for many years had his star not been eclipsed by the arrival of Jay Gould, Jr.

Jay Gould was America's best amateur player. He was born in 1888, and was playing court tennis by the age of 12.

RAILROAD, CONT.

America had not—and would not—see his equal. His effect on the sport was almost messianic. Surely, one feels, there must have been an omen, an augury of his coming—if only some soothsayer had been watching the skies, or examining the entrails of the appropriate species of bird.

Gould's spectacular play relied heavily on his railroad, and it was his success with the serve that gave it credence beyond the Atlantic. Indeed, Gould's popularization of the railroad was so extensive that many credit him as the serve's inventor—although his railroad was different from previous iterations only in its proximity to perfection.

Gould's railroad was so potent—and so unfamiliar to overseas players—that there was actually a movement in England to change the rules of service so as to make the railroad less effective. A 1877 Washington Post article describes English

experiments intended to prevent Gould from "mak[ing] spectacles of them with his 'railroad' service."

Under the revised rules, a line was drawn parallel to the half-court line and four feet from the gallery wall, and another line was drawn parallel to the net between hazard the door and hazard second gallery. The service had to be delivered nearer to the main wall than the first line, and had to hit the penthouse beyond the second line.

In other words, the server could not stand closer than 4 feet from the gallery wall when serving, and the ball had to bounce on the penthouse past hazard better than the door, rather than simply past the net. Needless to say, this would make the railroad more difficult to deliver at high speeds—the server would have to make do with a sidewall railroad or with a low-speed, high-spin variant, as used by Sears.

The revised rules were tried out in a match between Peter Latham and E. Johnson at Prince's Club, Knighthurst. Neither player attempted any sort of railroad, this being viewed as too difficult. Both agreed that the revised rules did not significantly impede their normal serves.

However, many English players objected to the proposed changes, and the experiments apparently ended quietly.

The railroad, meanwhile, has endured, largely unchanged from the days of Gould. A few players still hit the serve in the style of Richard Sears, with heavy cut and low speed—including Prince's Court's own Vu Hoang, whose railroad is inspired by his former training at table tennis. But most rely on the adder-quick railroad invented by Crane and popularized by Gould—a service that safeguards the galleries and can, if executed correctly, flummox all but the most experienced of players.

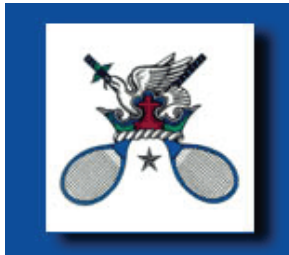
**“examining
the entrails
of the
appropriate
species of
bird.”**

FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE OUR WEBSITE:

WWW.PRINCESCOURT.COM

PRINCE'S COURT

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*Σφαιριηται δ' άρ έπαιξον, απο κρηδεμνα βαλουσαι
Βη δ' ίμεν ώς τε λέων ορεσιτροφος αλκι πεποιθος*

PRINCE'S COURT IN THE WASHINGTON POST!

Prince's Court recently got some well-deserved press coverage when Washington Post reporter Les Carpenter wrote a lengthy feature on the court.

The article's focus is on the founding of Prince's Court by Haven Pell. But the article also gives considerable attention to the club itself.

Tireless work by Haven Pell, Temple Grassi, and our professionals—as well as enthusiastic support by Prince's Club members—resulted in an article that was quite fa-

vorable to the court. The article particularly notes the club's diverse membership and down-home attitude—a relief to those tired of hearing the sport described as “elite and obscure.”

The article has already resulted in inquiries from some of the Post's readers, and was displayed prominently by the managers of Regency Sport & Health.

Several members of the court were quoted in the article, and others—notably Phil Shannon and J.Z. Golden,—

were photographed. The reporters also took video of league play, some of which is available on the Washington Post's website.

The story is available at:
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/05/AR2009090502593_4.html.

Video is available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/video/2009/09/03/VI2009090302249.html?hpid=topnews>.

Prince's Court was built in 1997, the first court to be built from scratch in the United States since before World War I. It is one of only ten courts in the United States, and about 40 throughout the world. It is one of the only courts to have a glass main wall, allowing many more spectators to view a match than is possible on older courts.

Prince's Court is located at the Regency Sport & Health club of McLean, Virginia. It is managed by its professionals and by a committee of its own members.

For more on the sport of court tennis, as well as a more comprehensive guide to upcoming events, see the website of the United States Court Tennis Association, available at www.uscta.com.