

## EDITOR'S NOTE

### Lessons Learned?

Tennis on Campus, once a key program for this industry, appears to have been left behind. It's time to get it back on the syllabus.

Once in a while, a program comes along that truly has the chance to be game-changing for this industry. In the last issue, I wrote about one such program, Cardio Tennis, which thankfully seems to now be experiencing a rebirth in this country.

Another program, started in 2000, is Tennis on Campus. It was designed to capture the thousands of former high school tennis players and others who moved on to college but not onto the limited spots on varsity tennis teams. TOC, managed by the USTA with a key partnership with NIRSA (National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association), kept these students playing tennis, and it was an important bridge into adult tennis programs after college. TOC teams played teams from other colleges, with section TOC championships and the chance to go to a huge annual national championship.

At its height, TOC had more than 40,000 students playing on co-ed teams, at over 650 colleges and universities. These programs were student-run, which was another key to TOC's success, and they embodied everything that we always seem to want for tennis: the on-court action was fun at all levels of the game; playing co-ed and on teams provided a key social component; the idea that students themselves were creating and running TOC programs at their colleges empowered the students and provided leadership skills.

And, importantly, TOC became a breeding ground for tennis industry personnel. When TOC players left college, many became young leaders in this

industry itself, working for sections, NJTLs, CTAs, manufacturers, retailers, as teaching pros, etc.

But now, through budget and staff cuts, TOC has essentially been gutted. There is no full-time USTA staff devoted to the program, there's no real budget for it—and as a result, in recent years only 11,000 students participated at about 250 schools. Granted, the pandemic has probably played a part here, but I fear without support, TOC will just wither away even more.

Why, with a USTA mission to “promote and develop the growth of tennis,” would we de-emphasize a program that seems to embody all that we want this sport to do? Why would we essentially neglect a key “bridge” on the pathway from junior tennis to adult programs, and to creating lifelong tennis players and consumers? Why, in an industry that continually bemoans the fact that young people aren't entering it, would we minimize a program that produces young tennis leaders in abundance?

I've been in this industry long enough to know that if we want to truly grow, we need to play the “long game” when it comes to what's best for tennis, and we must prioritize programs that produce. Tennis on Campus has been proven to produce. It's time to make it a priority again.

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