

Tennis notable gets kids off the couch

Youth sports | Jim Flynn, a state champion in 1949 and '50, helps the Police Activities League

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SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Jim Flynn still finds time to return to the Portland tennis courts he cherishes — no longer to compete but to share his 60-year love of the game with others.

Last week, the 72-year-old local tennis icon set golf clubs aside to spend his days with youngsters who might seem unlikely to pick up a racket. His sessions at David Douglas High School were part of an annual series of sports day camps offered by the Police Activities League of Greater Portland.

"It's controlled chaos, and these are mostly beginners," Flynn said. "We don't press too hard, but we use tennis as a vehicle to give them a little recreation and a little confidence — and get them off the sofa."

On one midweek morning, two dozen 8- to 14-year-olds gathered on the courts. They seemed eager to absorb Flynn's wisdom as he prodded and praised, coaxed and cajoled. A wink, a smile or a pithy observation was always in the mix.

Flynn has given thousands of tennis lessons during a run that includes state championships for Central Catholic High School in 1949 and 1950, a standout career at the University of Portland and a



Former local tennis champion Jim Flynn teaches the game to youngsters through the Police Activities League summer camp. The former Bureau of Parks & Recreation tennis director has worked the camps the past eight years.

key role in bringing public indoor tennis to town with the opening of the Portland Tennis Center in 1973.

He retired as the Bureau of Parks & Recreation's tennis director in 1998, leaving the legacy of a popular award-winning program. The weeklong tennis camp has been Flynn's beat for eight years.

PAL's goal is to encourage positive interaction between police and kids. Officer Brock Sorensen, 57, has organized the tennis segment for a decade. Sorensen, also a former University of Portland tennis player, gave campers a breezy sketch of tennis history and lighthearted discipline in the form of 10 pushups at a time.

Flynn is quick to credit Sorensen with the program's success.

"I'm a volunteer," he said. "The lead man is Brock, and we're a pretty good crew. I learned much of my stuff from world-class guys, and I'm just passing it along."

After about 20 hours and five days with Flynn, plenty is bound to rub off. This year, two camp graduates — with about 10 years and 200 hours of Flynn's tutelage between them — have returned, joining the crew as volunteer instructors. One, Jennifer Norris, will be a sophomore this fall at Reynolds High School. She credits five years at camp for teaching her how to play.

"But I also learned teamwork," she said, "and how to teach and cooperate."

Flynn, whose aunt, Marion Brown, was a city champion in the 1920s and '30s, picked up his first racket around age 11 or 12.

"My interest starts from there," he said. "I was a good local player, but there were plenty of other players who were better."

Flynn eventually scored the University of Portland's first tennis scholarship in the fall of 1951 and played there for four years.

"I think my record was 53-3," he said. "When I left, we had won 60 matches in a row, and we were a good small-college team. We did not schedule UCLA."

Flynn also volunteers at the Portland Community Transitional School for homeless youngsters. But he no longer spends much time on the tennis court.

"I got a new hip 25 years ago," he said. "The parts wear out, and now I don't play much anymore."

Not that he is complaining. He and his wife, Annie, have been married 17 years, live in Northeast Portland and have 13 children and 17 grandchildren between them. Nowadays, chasing a little white ball has become their passion.

"Golf is every Monday, Wednesday and Friday," Flynn said. "And every month, we go somewhere out of town to play. . . . We've also got a big yard, and that's my private park."

"I'm reduced to golf and gardening. Not too bad."