

Memories and memorabilia mark years of service

I love tennis – both playing and watching. I prize my memories and memorabilia from years of watching professionals on the grass courts at the Newport Hall of Fame Tennis Championships.

From July 6 to 12, the ATP top men world tour players compete for the Van Alen Cup and \$500,000 in prize money on the legendary courts in Newport. Fabrice Santoro of France, along with Americans Mardy Fish, Sam Querrey and Robby Ginepri are the top players this year.

Family Weekend takes place on July 4 and 5, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., during the qualifying rounds when players try to win a spot in the tournament. Special lower fees are in effect for families to watch these matches.

The class of 2009 induction ceremony includes Monica Seles, Andres Gimeno, Donald L. Dell and Dr. Robert Johnson. Class of 1981 Hall of Famer Rod Laver will also be honored during the ceremony to celebrate the 40th anniversary of his 1969 Grand Slam triumph.

So many of my memories begin back when I was a driver, picking up players at Green Airport and taking them to their digs in Newport. I could see only those matches my driving schedule allowed. Being a line umpire in the mid-1980s is another great memory. Learning the ropes through practice and tests preceded our actual on-court activity. The big perk was that we umpires were invited to play on the practice courts--my first time playing on grass. Both of the above were paid positions.

Then, I learned about volunteering as an usher. That was the best choice for me.

I ushered in the West Box for



My Turn

By Sunny Hocutt

years and was able to watch tennis on center court for as many days as I committed to work. The 50th anniversary celebration in 2004 was an unforgettable event for me because so many tennis greats attended. I was thrilled to see Australian Ken Rosewall up close and personal. He was a favorite of mine at that time. Happy memories, all.

The memorabilia I've collected includes the usher nametags I wore each year. I have many. Also, ushers received shirts, which we wore while on duty. Each shirt bore the insignia of the particular tournament. I've given some away to friends, but still wear my favorites. Finally, when Chris Evert was inducted into the Tennis Hall of Fame, we received a pin celebrating that.

Always present was Mark Stenning, Hall of Fame CEO, who knew I'd been an usher for years and would stop for a friendly chat. Also, arriving before the induction ceremony, dressed in his outrageously-colored trousers, Bud Collins would nod and smile as we passed on the grounds. Of course, the regulars in the West Box were familiar faces to me and we exchanged pleasantries.

This year, I will be a guest in the Hall of Fame's reserved section of West Box, in thanks for my many years of volunteering. Sweet!

For more information about

this week's events, call 849-6053 or visit www.tennisfame.com.

Sunny Hocutt displays some of the usher name tags she has collected through the years.

Photo by Caitlin Downing



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