



NEW ENGLAND

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Community Tennis Association News

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### USTA New England announces partnership with Skyhawks Sports Academy

Organizations will run QuickStart Tennis camps, programs

WESTBORO, Mass. – As part of its ongoing effort to introduce tennis to a new generation of players, USTA New England announced that it has formed a partnership with Skyhawks Sports Academy, Inc., a leader in developing, marketing and conducting youth tennis camps.

Skyhawks Sports will team with USTA New England’s Community Tennis Department to create New England-based tennis camps and programs that will feature and implement the QuickStart Tennis format, which is designed to bring kids into the game by utilizing specialized equipment, shorter court dimensions and modified scoring, all tailored to age and size.

“Teaming up with Skyhawks Sports Academy is a tremendous opportunity for USTA New England, but more importantly, a tremendous opportunity for children to learn the game of tennis in a safe, structured and fun environment,” said Deirdre McCormack, USTA New England’s Director of Community Tennis. “We believe the QuickStart Tennis format is an extraordinarily effective teaching tool, and our partnership with Skyhawks Sports Academy will maximize our ability to deliver that product.”

For more on the camps or to register, contact Dennis A. Mannone Jr. (MA & NH) at 978-870-0135 / dmannone@skyhawks.com; or, Sarah Kelly (CT) at 860-344-010 / skelly@skyhawks.com.

Skyhawks Sports youth sports camps are committed to providing a safe, fun and skills-focused experience for kids between the ages of 3 and 15. Skyhawks is a national youth sports camp company with local camps throughout the United States, as well as limited locations in Canada.

### Franklin Park Tennis

ROXBURY, Mass. – There aren’t many better places for a stranger who likes the game of tennis to wander through than Boston Franklin’s Park.

On any given day, the Franklin Park Tennis Association can be found holding court and Boston’s largest “tennis family” is a welcoming bunch.

“Something you see constantly with the Franklin Park group is people just providing a welcoming environment. We don’t turn anyone away,” said Jeannine Laing, program director for the Franklin Park Tennis Association, a USTA New England community tennis association. “I’ve seen players offer their rackets to strangers who don’t have one so they can give the game a try. I can’t even count how many impromptu free lessons I’ve seen take place in the park. I think that’s what draws people to Franklin Park and gets them involved in our programs.”

Laing is speaking from experience.

Her first exposure to tennis – aside from a brief encounter with the sport in a fourth-grade gym class – was at Franklin Park.

After constant urging, Laing finally gave into a friend’s request to see what was happening in the park. She borrowed a racket one day and has been a fixture in the Franklin Park family ever since.

The Franklin Park Tennis Association was founded 19 years ago and serves Boston’s inner-city neighborhoods, including Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan and Jamaica Plain.

Through networking and forming partnerships with influential organizations such as the Franklin Park Coalition, Sportsmen’s Tennis Club, the Boston Parks and Recreation Department and the USTA, FPTA has been able to live its mission statement and “unite families and community through the sport of tennis.”

Laing is most pleased with the progress being made in one of the FPTA’s many youth-oriented programs.

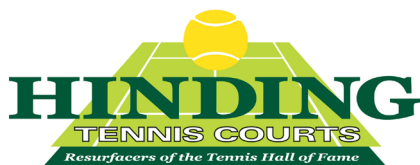
Each Sunday a group of young tennis players invades the indoor courts at Sportsmen’s for lessons. When the older are children are done with their two hours of court time and instruction, they become instructors themselves, teaching and mentoring children as young as 3.

“That program has been a tremendous success and we couldn’t be happier with how it’s grown (more than 300 participants),” Laing said. “The older kids have been outstanding and they take their responsibilities very seriously. Before we had the older kids teaching the younger kids, we had to scramble for adult volunteers. The kids have been fabulous and it’s their way of serving the community and giving back.”

FPTA also offers Friday night tennis socials at Sportsmen’s Tennis Club.

In addition, the FPTA is involved in many traditional USTA programs, including League tennis and Jr. Team Tennis.

For more information on becoming involved as a player or volunteer, please visit [www.franklinparktennis.org](http://www.franklinparktennis.org).



## “ACEing” Autism

By Michael Liuzza

One may not think the sport of tennis and the neurodevelopmental disorder autism go together, but as it turns out, that could not be further from the truth. Just ask Richard Spurling.

In September of 2008, Spurling and his wife, Shafali Jeste, created a program called ACEing Autism, a USTA New England community tennis association. A year and a half later, that same program is still running strong.

“My wife — a pediatric neurologist who focuses her research on autism — and I started the program because we wanted to do something together,” said Spurling. “We also both love tennis, as I have been teaching the game for the past decade.”

Jeste has been diagnosing autism at Children’s Hospital, and over the years has learned parents often travel to numerous places to find suitable programs for their kids.

“My wife told me children on the autism spectrum thrive in play-based programs,” said Spurling. “We thought tennis would provide a great fit for these kids. It would work on so many things, including hand-eye coordination, fitness, social skills, motor skills and their confidence.” The program itself, which teaches the basic skills of tennis to children with autism, began at the Longfellow Club in Wayland. Back then, only 15 kids participated. But before the blink of an eye, that number grew to 30.

A year ago, Spurling and Jeste decided it was time to expand, so they added another location — the Weymouth Club.

Today, ACEing Autism is held on Saturdays at both sites, offering two 45-minute sessions at each club.

Spurling says the format for each session is pretty much the same each week. The group begins with five minutes of aerobic exercises, followed by two laps around the courts. After that, common exercises from the baseline to the net are performed, including sidestepping, jumping, skipping and lunges. After that, the group moves on to volleys and ground strokes.

“With this population you have to make it fun and keep it creative,” said Spurling. “Keeping their focus is the biggest challenge. Yes, it is basic skills, but most of the children are between the ages of four and eight, so it’s their first time on a tennis court.”

Each session concludes with games.

“A big component to our program is to try and get the kids to interact and work on their social skills, such as waiting for their turn, picking up balls and giving each other high-fives,” he said.

Spurling and Jeste are currently in the middle of moving to Los Angeles, Calif., but don’t think for one second the program is going to stop. In fact, Spurling hopes to expand it.

“We have a strong board of directors in Boston — including Vanessa Vogel, the Director of Operations — to keep the program going even though we are now living in Los Angeles,” said Spurling. “As soon as we are settled here we will launch the program here as well.”

ACEing Autism is a 501 c non-profit organization. There is a \$150 charge for a 10-week session.

“In addition to the program revenue we have several grants that support us, including the USTA New England section, the Youth Tennis Foundation and the Wellesley Hills Junior Women’s Club,” said Spurling. “The Flatley Foundation has also made a generous donation.”

Spurling also says the program would not be possible without the help of weekly, loyal volunteers.

“The Brandeis tennis teams have been helping every week,” he said. “The Boston College men’s tennis team and Wellesley College have both helped out, as have high school student volunteers.”

ACEing Autism has been a success, and Spurling and his wife expect the program to be around for quite some time.

“I hope this runs for years,” he said. “I think we started something special and worthwhile and I will do my best to see that it grows.”

Spurling went on to say he has seen tremendous progress and that, eventually, he would like to see this program in all tennis clubs.



## NEW BRITAIN, Conn. – USTA New England’s continued giving has led to a little getting.

USTA New England has received the prestigious “Benefits are Endless” award from the City of New Britain, thanks to its ongoing partnership with the city’s parks and recreation and school departments. Through the guidance and support of Deirdre McCormack, USTA New England’s Director of Community Tennis and Nikita Zaharov, Community Relations Manager for Northern Connecticut, New Britain was awarded \$11,000 worth of programming and facility grants.

The grants were used to grow the game in the city, with \$7,500 going toward the resurfacing of the Don Davis Tennis Courts and \$3,500 toward the establishment of a Jr. Team Tennis league for the city’s youth.

“We offer USTA New England our sincerest congratulations and deepest gratitude for the contributions it has bestowed upon the City of New Britain,” said William A. DeMaio, the city’s Director of Parks and Recreation. “Tennis is flourishing in New Britain and a lot of it would not have been possible if it were not for USTA England and its staff.”

In addition to providing grant money, USTA New England presented an in-service training to members of the parks and recreation staff and physical education teachers. The training was a huge success, as evidenced by the fact that the QuickStart Tennis format is now a prominent part of the physical education curriculum in city schools.

“It was my distinct honor to accept this award on behalf of USTA New England and the Community Tennis Department,” said McCormack “The relationship that we have built with New Britain as an organization is reflective of our mission to promote and develop the growth of tennis, especially at the grassroots level. The people of New Britain and its leadership have been a pleasure to work with and we know that the recent surge in tennis activity is only the beginning of what will come in the future.”

McCormack accepted the award on USTA New England’s behalf at a ceremony at City Hall, that was attended by Mayor Timothy Stewart.

In addition to USTA New England, three other organizations received Benefits are Endless awards, including Musco Sport Lighting, Inc., the Women’s Club of New Britain and the Lighthouse Family Worship Center.