

Recreational *Tennis*



National Senior Men's Tennis Association player Mark Vines (left), in action. Jimmy Parker (right) is a founder of the organization, created to promote tennis for players 55 and over.

GRASSROOTS GROWTH

They've Done Some Great Things

The National Senior Men's Tennis Association aims to improve the game for a growing segment of players.

BY PAUL FEIN

They play to live, and they live to play. While their bodies may not be quite what they once were, their spirits are better than ever, brimming with enthusiasm. Seniors from ages 40 to 100 comprise an increasing percentage of America's 18 million tennis players, and some 265,000 of these athletes competed in USTA senior tournaments and leagues last year.

In January 2018, Jimmy Parker, Jerry Thomas, Steve Duffel, Mas Kimball,

Larry Turville and Ed Trost founded the National Senior Men's Tennis Association. Parker is quick to credit John Powless as "the true dean of men's senior tennis for ably carrying the banner of Super Senior Tennis for many years." Super Senior Tennis was created shortly after World War II to promote tennis for players 55 and over.

"We all realized that senior tournament tennis was a relatively low priority for the USTA," says Parker, the NSMTA president and its superstar player with a record 150 national titles.

"The six of us formed the first Board of Directors. Fortuitously, we each have different skill sets, and we wouldn't be where we are without the unique contributions of each one of us, especially Mas, who created a diverse website from scratch."

The Original Six were also inspired by their highly successful women's counterpart.

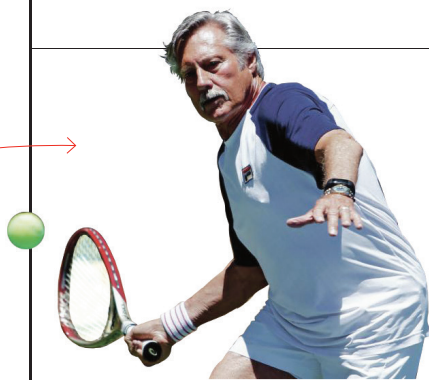
"The senior women had founded the National Senior Women's Tennis Association more than 40 years ago," explains **Parker**. "They wanted us to get off our butts and do the same for the men, to provide a more unified front in advocating senior tennis competition."

The NSMTA's biggest goals are to improve the experience of playing senior tennis, provide input to the USTA, and offer a forum for players to exchange ideas. The full mission statement is on their website, nsmta.net.

The well-designed, easy-to-navigate website also features a wealth of information and advice about senior tennis. There are articles by leading tennis writers, thought-provoking blogs, member-written stories, instructional and health-related insights relevant to seniors, poignant reminiscences, tournament news and photos, and book reviews. For a small fee, anyone can advertise their own tournament or event on the website.

The fast-growing NSMTA, which boasts nearly 800 members, already has more than lived up to its motto: "Let's do some great things for senior men's tennis together!"

Among its impressive accomplishments, the NSMTA inaugurated a Triple Crown concept that it partially underwrites, linking groups of three existing tournaments into a grand prix format. Longboat Key, Naples and St. Petersburg Cat II's, and the Wilson in Palm



Desert, Pacific Southwest and Fiesta Bowl Cat II's are now set up as Triple Crowns, with more to come.

The fledgling organization also inaugurated an Invitational Team Series, putting some already success-

ful doubles events under one umbrella, like the Jerry Kirk Memorial and the Mountain Team Doubles Invitational, along with new ones like the Gatlin Cup and the Rasgado New Year's Doubles Team Cup.

Other noteworthy achievements include providing financial assistance to tournaments that agreed to follow NSMTA guidelines, which included using the round-robin doubles format; setting up a grant program to assist clubs in obtaining Automated External Defibrillator equipment; making available the Tournament Directors Handbook for free online; and inaugurating a

Community Outreach Program to raise money for local tennis organizations.

While the NSMTA has come a long way in a short time, Parker has shown no indication of slowing down.

"We'd like to expand our membership and continue to make our website better," he says. "We are adding tournaments to our Triple Crown format, and want to continue to inaugurate doubles events. And we're always looking for ways to partner with the NSWTA. We're discussing aging-up points, which the USTA currently vaporizes when you move up into a new age group.

"There's plenty to keep us busy." ■

Longtime tennis writer Paul Fein has received more than 40 writing awards and authored three books: "Tennis Confidential: Today's Greatest Players, Matches, and Controversies"; "You Can Quote Me on That: Greatest Tennis Quips, Insights, and Zingers"; and "Tennis Confidential II: More of Today's Greatest Players, Matches, and Controversies." Fein is also a USPTA-certified teaching pro and coach with an Elite rating, a former director of the Springfield (Mass.) Satellite Tournament, a former Top 10-ranked men's open New England tournament player and No. 1-ranked Super Senior player in New England. His websites are www.tennisconfidential.com and www.tennisquotes.com.

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