

Pumping Up Tennis in Your Town
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March 21, 2013

As I look out the window snow is falling, the pavement is wet and the temperature is around 34 degrees. Great weather for playing tennis. In fact, on a Saturday in February in Piper City, IL 20 children, ages 5 to 12 will have a blast swinging rackets at purple and yellow tennis balls.

Piper City is a rural Illinois town of about 850 people. Between 2000 and 2010 the population grew by 5%. However, Piper City struggles to offer enough activities for the kids. There is volleyball in the winter, and basketball in Branch Park almost year round. However, the Girl Scouts are only now forming a troop. There is no Boy Scout troop. There is no little league baseball in the summer or soccer league in the fall.

First Presbyterian Church sits kitty corner from Branch Park, and the tennis courts, two of them. I was drawn to the tennis courts because tennis has been my sport of choice in my 50s. I thought maybe we could get a tennis program going in Piper City.



I contacted the United States Tennis Association (USTA) about starting up a program. As good as the USTA had been in organizing the summer tennis leagues I've played in, I assumed they would simply send me a brochure and best wishes. Instead I got all kinds of support, including the careful attention of Bret Schrama, Illinois Tennis Service Representative

Last October we held a Tennis Play Day in the school gym. Bret and the staff of the Northern Illinois District came to Piper City and put on a two hour clinic of fun, exercise and skill building.

We followed that up with six one-hour lessons on succeeding Saturday afternoons, again in the school gym. I taught the lessons, with the assistance of an accomplished tennis player attending the local high school. I had not taught youth tennis before so I turned to short, instructional videos on the USTA website to learn what drills to use. We used two portable, kid-size nets, kid-size rackets, and maroon and yellow kid-friendly tennis balls. The emphasis was on having fun, hoping the participants will equate

tennis with fun. At the end of the six weeks 13 children each received a free, high quality tennis racket.



In January we staged another Tennis Play Day, with 20 children participating. This month we kicked off another set of six lessons. The tennis program in Piper City is growing. We are forming a Community Tennis Association to enable Piper City to receive grants from the USTA to help

pay for equipment and court upgrades.

I invite you to think about tennis as a way to serve young people in your community in Indiana or Illinois. To contact the USTA (Midwest Section) go to:

<http://www.midwest.usta.com/> or call 317.577.5130.