



WOUNDED WARRIORS RALLY AT MORLEY FIELD COURTS

By [Logan Jenkins](#) 12:01 a.m. April 23, 2012. Updated 3:30 p.m. April 22, 2012

As I've chronicled in self-pitying detail, I had shoulder surgery six months ago. It's been a slow recovery, but I'm back on the tennis court, rallying at half-speed.

Thursday, at the invitation of Geoff Griffin, Balboa Tennis Club's director, I played the best game of my usually self-absorbed life.

On a back court at Morley Field, I hit with a cheerful young man who'd never played tennis before. A gifted athlete and a third my age, he had the added incentive of playing before his attractive fiancée.

His injury, suffered in October, made my torn rotator cuff seem about as important as a gnat's bite on an old rhino's hide.

He'd lost three limbs — both legs and one arm. To get around the court, he powered his wheelchair with his arm, his racket in the crook of his elbow. When he was in position, he grasped the grip, drew back the racket head, and hit the ball with surprising force.

I was at net feeding balls when he drilled me square in the chest. I wailed in mock agony over the stinging blow.

"If I hit you again, you have to buy me a soda!" he laughed.

Like the jerkwater writer I am, I wanted to ask him where and exactly how IT happened. But we were too busy playing a game to talk about history.

Besides, on the back of his wheelchair was stenciled all I really needed to know: "Purple Heart United States Marine Corps."

On fields and courts, waves and slopes, wounded men and women return to sport and, I'm glad to report, San Diego tennis, a sun-damaged family within which I grew up, is playing at a championship level.

For three years, volunteers at Morley, the eucalyptus-covered cradle of San Diego tennis, have welcomed 10 to 25 wounded warriors from Balboa Hospital to twice-a-month camps. Under Griffin's guidance, the San Diego model has been replicated near other military hospitals.

From May 16 through the 19th, Morley Field is hosting the first national camp. According to Steve Kappes, president of the San Diego District Tennis Association, the response was double what was anticipated. Suddenly, a \$15,000 grant from the U.S. Olympic Committee wasn't nearly enough to cover the travel, food and lodging for 31 wounded warriors from all around the country. More donors are being sought.

On May 6, Morley is taking another winning shot. The 12th annual Tennis Fest, a full day of exhibitions and clinics, is partnering with ThanksUSA, a national organization that raises money for the educational costs of military families.

In the healing shadow of Balboa Hospital, Morley is working a kind of magic that hits you in the heart.

I felt it Thursday and, if I'm lucky, I'll feel that sharp sting in the chest again.

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