



WOUNDED WARRIOR TENNIS CAMP HITS NEW HIGHS



Over 50 wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans from 20 states participated in the 3rd Annual National Wounded Warrior Tennis Camp at the Balboa Tennis Club in San Diego.

by Steve Kappes, special to USTAFoundation.com

You know you're doing something right when you hold an event and twice as many people apply than in previous years, five local news stations cover it in prime time, the Mayor issues a Proclamation praising the program, and the Admiral in charge of one of the country's largest military medical centers writes to the president of the USTA to express his appreciation.

That's exactly what happened the week of May 19, 2014 as the San Diego District Tennis Association, in collaboration with Naval Medical Center San Diego and the Balboa Tennis Club, held its 3rd Annual National Wounded Warrior Tennis Camp – the only one of its kind in the country. Over 50 wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans from 20 states participated. They ranged in age from 21-77, and half had served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan – some multiple times. Others had served in previous conflicts dating back to Vietnam. Their injuries ranged from double amputations and partial paralyses to those which are invisible such as Traumatic Brain Injuries and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. As a result, there was a mix of wheelchair and ambulatory players.

The majority of the participants were beginning tennis players, but after 12 hours of instruction from some of San Diego's best pros, they were able to rally and compete in a friendly round-robin competition designed to pull together all the lessons of the week. While one of the goals of this program is to set wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans on a pathway to recovery by empowering them to play tennis when they return home, one of the larger benefits is giving the participants the opportunity to meet and become friends with those who have had similar battlefield experiences and other physical and emotional challenges.

In the words of one Wounded Warrior, "It is difficult to express in words how much this camp meant to those of us who had the privilege of attending. We absolutely had a blast. As a group we were able to smile, laugh, and bond and most importantly we were shown that people care about us. Getting to know the sport of tennis was simply incredible. I want to express how much your support has brightened our lives. It has been a pleasure meeting all of the veterans that participated in this camp and hopefully we will not just remain friends but find the time to continue assisting one another with our recovery process."

"The San Diego Tennis Camp is ensuring that not just my generation of veterans is a well-adjusted generation of veterans but that all veterans regardless of which branch or where or when they served is not forgotten, and this is huge. As a veteran of Iraqi Freedom, this means a lot to me. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the support you give our wounded warriors."

"Your tennis program and the city of San Diego managed to ensure each and every one of us that attended this camp knows that our country loves us as much as we love it."

Thanks to generous financial and in-kind donations from the USTA, local businesses, restaurants, community and veteran support organizations, tennis clubs and individuals, all the participants' costs were covered including airfare, lodging, meals, local transportation, tennis equipment and instruction, and evening social events. Over 50

enthusiastic volunteers from across San Diego county assisted with daily site set-up and breakdown, on-court assistance, airport transportation, meal preparation and service, medical care, massage therapy, and more.

For more information on this nationally-recognized program, which includes ongoing free weekly tennis clinics for wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans, please visit the Wounded Warrior Tennis section of the San Diego District Tennis Association website, www.sandiegotennis.com, and the program's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/sdwoundedwarriorstennis>.