

THE DTP CONNECTION

THE DENVER TENNIS PARK NEWSLETTER

TENNIS FOR EVERYONE

GABRIEL GUILLAUME



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The Denver Tennis Park was created to advance youth development through tennis. However, to achieve, the potential for all youth, we must break through the exclusive nature of tennis's reputation.



For nearly its entire history, tennis has had a reputation for being a sport of white privilege limited to country clubs and cocktails. Despite a wide range of efforts, tennis's diversity remains largely just at the professional level among a relatively small group of celebrities or near celebrities. It's helpful, of course, to have positive role models of color at the professional level; however, if we are really serious about advancing the potential impact of tennis for youth of color, we need to have local experts, mentors, and champions of color directly advancing it in communities. Destigmatizing tennis requires a grassroots approach in addition to having national role models. The United States Tennis Association Foundation (USTAF) and local institutions like the Colorado Youth Tennis Foundation (CYTF) and USTA Colorado have been committed to the same strategy through funding and other diversity, equity, inclusion efforts.

The Denver Tennis Park (DTP) is one of many recipients of funding and knowledge from the USTAF and CYTF. Those funds go to our school-based, community-based, and scholarship programs that have already reached nearly a thousand youth with limited resources since this past Fall, many of whom are youth of color. However, the most important investment the DTP made through those funds and others has been the creation of an outreach team. Sonia Schwartz (Community Outreach Manager) and Sofia DeBenedittis (Community Programs & Outreach Coordinator) have been working diligently since the late summer to establish partnerships, implement programming, and listen to community needs. Bringing tennis to communities of color is only one part of what it takes to create access to the sport. Our outreach team is doing much more than that and believe the following approaches are what will create a lasting change in who can relate to and benefit from tennis:

- **ESTABLISH AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS:** We are establishing partnerships with organizations like the SW Denver Coalition, Colorado Lions Youth Organization, SW Denver Youth Athletics, Big Brothers Big Sister of Colorado, Struggle of Love Foundation, and others. These partner organizations are led by people of color working to provide opportunities for youth of color, and they are beginning to trust that tennis is an opportunity for their constituents.
- **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS:** Our outreach team has recently formed a parent advisory committee in Montbello and will work to establish one in Southwest Denver as we begin meeting and connecting to families through our programming.



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- **MENTORSHIP:** Although not established as a program yet, the DTP is exploring methods for mentorship between younger and older youth, as well as between youth and adults. Our SERVES program, made possible through CYTF and other donors, has already established various informal mentorship relationships between youth of color of varying ages. Other organizations across the country have successful mentorship programs that clearly supports relatability, inspiration, and accountability.
- **HIRING INSTRUCTORS OF COLOR:** The DTP knows that if we are going to reach youth of color, we need to have staff that look like and can relate to the families we are reaching and serving. This can foster mentorship, relationship-building, and inform DTP's strategies to make tennis more accessible. We currently have considerable diversity on our team and we will continue to cultivate such diversity.
- **HIRING JUNIOR INSTRUCTORS:** As we begin to work with more youth in communities of color, we are beginning to identify those who are interested in being hired as junior instructors. Many of our instructor team and outreach team started this way and we see a wide range of benefits from job experience, to academic opportunity, to making some money doing something one loves. Last summer we had two junior instructors supporting our Montbello camp. We plan to have more this year and many more beyond.
- **DELIVER CONSISTENT HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMMING:** Sometimes community-based programming can suffer from poor quality programming due to resources, distance, and/or complicated circumstances, like access to good courts and equipment. The DTP is committed to ensuring that our programming standards do not change whether at our facility or in the community. While we may adjust our programs to accommodate community and cultural requests, the quality will not change, and with good quality comes an ongoing interest in the sport and what it can do for youth development.
- **MARKETING AND LANGUAGE:** To encourage access to tennis, we must also learn to brand and communicate using diverse marketing strategies, translate our outreach materials, and rely on community partners to conduct outreach and inform our strategies.



These strategies and more are critical to our approach and learning as we continue to grow and sophisticate our strategy to create tennis opportunities for everyone.

Do you have ideas to help increase access to tennis? Let us know by emailing Gabriel Guillaume at gabriel@denvertennispark.org.



YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

THALIA WILKINS



FAVORITE TENNIS PLAYER: Coco Gauff and Jelena Ostapenko

FAVORITE SHOT: Down the line backhand

SINGLES OR DOUBLES: Singles

GOALS FOR 2022: Work towards a better serve and become more interested in reading

HOBBIES OUTSIDE OF TENNIS: Cross training, rock climbing, cooking and baking (and watching cooking and baking videos), collecting stuff animals (she **LOVES** sloths!)

Thalia Wilkins is a quiet 9 year old from Denver, but on the tennis court her dedicated work ethic and performance does all the talking. Her dad Earl says Thalia held her first tennis racquet at the age of 2, and by the time she was 3 she was taking classes at Life Time. As she got older, the family played at various rec centers and tennis facilities to keep up with her evolving tennis training. The Wilkins started playing at the Denver Tennis Park (DTP) in the summer of 2020, and have been regulars ever since. Earl says the location works for their busy family schedule and provides consistency for Thalia's training; Thalia likes the coaches and learning new ways to become a better, well-rounded player. As an active player in the Elementary Advanced Development Program, Thalia likes playing tennis because of the competition; she loves the wins and uses the losses as learning experiences for how to be better. Her recent tennis accolades include a first place win at the Pinery Country Club Girls 10s in December. The future is bright for Thalia; we're proud of the growth she's shown in the couple years she's been at the DTP, and we can't wait to witness all the growth that is to come!

TEAM SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY OUTREACH

SONIA SCHWARTZ AND SOFIA DEBENEDITTIS

Sonia Schwartz is a Denver native who has a passion for serving her community through tennis like none other. She learned how to play tennis completely by chance as a high schooler; her and a friend were hanging out at Berkely Park when a group of community members invited Sonia and her friend to join them on court. She would go on to play tennis at New Mexico State University and when she returned to Colorado, she worked at Jefferson County Parks & Rec, running tennis programs at rec centers and in under-served communities. Family soon became her main focus, but Sonia continued to stay engaged with the tennis community through USTA Colorado and community events such as Tennis Fest. The events surrounding George Floyd in the summer of 2020 deeply troubled Sonia and motivated her to dive back into community work. She became involved with Colorado Lions Youth Organization and started a series of summer tennis camps in Montbello. She joined the Denver Tennis Park in August 2021 as Community Outreach Coordinator (now Manager) and has been instrumental in connecting the DTP with community organizations and schools in Montbello and Southwest Denver.

Sofia DeBenedittis joined the Community Outreach team in January 2022, but "Coach Sof" has been teaching at the DTP since the summer of 2019. The Montbello native learned how to play tennis from her dad on the public courts of Denver. She cites her experience as a player on the Montbello High School girls tennis team as the inspiration for wanting to teach tennis. "We had a group of volunteer coaches who were the most consistent, caring coaches I ever had, and I knew I wanted to help my community like them one day," she says. After graduating from Colorado State University in 2020 with a degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, she returned to the DTP as a full-time instructor. Looking for ways to volunteer with tennis in the community, she connected with Sonia and served as a coach at the Colorado Lions summer tennis camps in Montbello. As Community Programs & Outreach Coordinator, Sofia is eager and ready to bring tennis to under resourced schools and communities.



SONIA SCHWARTZ
(left)

SOFIA DEBENEDITTIS
(right)

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

GABRIEL GUILLAUME

This past holiday season, and still going, we launched a Ball-Plaque fundraising campaign. Donors who gave \$500 or more had a Ball-Plaque displayed at the DTP. These will remain up all year and annual donations keep it up each year after that. On behalf of the Board and myself, we would like to thank those who donated:

- Altruic Advisors
- Ed & Michelle Anderson
- Jim & Debi Bashleben
- Mark & Jennifer Bugge
- Michelle Campbell
- Cook Family
- Croxton Family
- Guillaume Family
- Babu Iyer
- Maureen Kechriotis
- Maria Lapko
- Corrie Lee
- Matthew Mendez
- Kim Riley
- Anne Rowe
- Robert Ryan
- Bruce & Cheryl Scott
- Techvana
- In memory of "TQ"
- Barry Zink
- Colorado Lions Youth Organization *(donation made on behalf of)*
- DTP Staff *(donation made on behalf of)*
- USTA Colorado & Colorado Youth Tennis Foundation *(as a result of grants provided)*



DTP WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER KEITH BELL



The Denver Tennis Park is honored to have Keith Bell join our board. Keith brings over 25 years of volunteer and professional experience in the tennis industry. He has focused primarily in the space of growing and developing tennis at the grassroots. Keith's professional career experiences span two decades in corporate, national, and local business industries with a broad range of leadership positions from Sr. Diversity Manager, Director of Youth Services and Director of Community Development. Currently, Keith serves as a Director of Recreation with the City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation. Keith is an avid tennis player and certified tennis teaching professional. He is looking forward to serving in his new volunteer role on the Board of Directors at DTP.

Welcome, Keith!

DTP CALENDAR

FEB. 28 - MAR. 25: ADULT UTR DRILLS SESSION VI

MAR. 14 - 20: FIRST WEEK OF SESSION 4 YOUTH CLASSES (NO MATCHPLAY FIRST WEEK)

MAR. 27: DU M VS NORTH DAKOTA @ 10AM

MAR. 27 - 29: [DTP SPRING BREAK OPEN #1 TOURNAMENT \(LEVEL 6: B/G 12U, 14U\)](#)

MAR. 30 - APR. 1: [DTP SPRING BREAK OPEN #2 TOURNAMENT \(LEVEL 6: B/G 16U, 18U\)](#)

APR. 1: DU M VS ORAL ROBERTS @ 1PM

APR. 2: DU W VS WESTERN ILLINOIS @ 1:30PM

APR. 4 - 29: ADULT UTR DRILLS SESSION VII

APR. 13: REGISTRATION OPENS FOR ADULT UTR DRILLS SESSION VIII

APR. 16: DU M VS ILLINOIS STATE @ 1:30PM

APR. 23 -24: [DTP GIRLS "NO RAIN ALLOWED" TOURNAMENT \(LEVEL 7: 12U, 14U, 16U, 18U\)](#)

APR. 24: [DTP BOYS "NO RAIN ALLOWED" TOURNAMENT \(LEVEL 7: 12U, 14U, 16U, 18U\)](#)

MAY 2 - 27: ADULT UTR DRILLS SESSION VIII

All DTP youth tournament registrations are through USTA.

Click on each tournament to view registration info!