

The History of USTA Atlanta

The Atlanta Community Tennis Association

The USTA Atlanta, officially known as the Atlanta Community Tennis Association, began as a volunteer-run, non-profit tennis league in 1980 (The USTA North Atlanta League). As the local community tennis association affiliated with the United States Tennis Association (USTA), it was formed to organize and run local tennis leagues for adults in the metropolitan Atlanta area. League play began with fifteen women's teams and three men's teams, with the organizers working from their homes. Today, the home office is in Peachtree Corners, Georgia. It has six staff members and hundreds of volunteers who support USTA Atlanta in its efforts as the largest Community Tennis Association in the country. The USTA Atlanta territory includes the counties of Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, and Paulding.

The Beginning ~ The Late 70s

1978 - The USTA supported a project begun by the Southern Tennis Association to start a local league pilot program in Birmingham, AL, Anderson-Greenville-Spartanburg, SC, Rome and Macon, GA, and Lynchburg, VA. One thousand participants enjoyed the program at the local level. On November 18, the first inter-city championships were held in Atlanta at the WCT Peachtree World of Tennis (Racquet Club of the South) with less than 100 participants.

1979 - Atlanta's own Pat Devoto and a small group of tennis friends went from town to town throughout the South, gathering interest in recreational tennis. They successfully created four levels of play for the pilot USTA league program. The first Wilson-STA Southern League Championships were held at WCT Peachtree World of Tennis with 315 players on 32 teams.

The 80s

1980 - To kick off the new decade, the USTA unanimously adopted a national league program that included levels 3.5, 4.5, and 5.5, with Southern being the first to offer a 2.5 level. Michelob Light becomes the first official sponsor. Martha Buttorff and Linda Nickels, both newcomers to the South, joined Horseshoe Bend Country Club and competed on an A-Level ALTA team in Atlanta. Linda, a USTA member and 4.5 player in New Jersey, asked Martha if she, too, was a USTA member. The two decided they wanted to play tennis at least one more day a week and formed the first 4.5 team in Atlanta. The nearest competition lived in Athens, which meant team road trips until more interest was generated locally. USTA membership in the South was 22,000, with a majority being adult and junior tournament players. Nationally, there were 13,000 players and only three levels of play (3.5, 4.5, and 5.5). The first National Championships were held in Chicago.

1982 - The USTA North Atlanta League formed a board of directors and filed articles of incorporation as a non-profit organization in DeKalb County, Georgia. As stated in the bylaws, our purpose was to promote the development of USTA programs and tennis within the metro-Atlanta area, establish and maintain fair play and high standards of sportsmanship, and represent Atlanta as a community tennis association as a member organization of the USTA. Martha and Linda met early in the year with DeWitt Redgrave, The Executive Director for the Southern Tennis Association, John Callen, Director of Tennis at Indian Hills Country Club, Randy Stephens, Director of Tennis at Willow Springs Country Club, Gary Wilson, from Hudlow Tennis Center, and Jon Neimeyer from Blackburn Tennis Center. The first league season commenced with fifteen women's teams and three men's teams, all formed from these clubs. Interstate 20 helped divide the new Atlanta leagues as Pet Devoto (Southern Tennis Association), and Carla Lord (Georgia Tennis Association) officially recognized the USTA North Atlanta League in addition to the new Southwest Atlanta League formed out of South Fulton Tennis Center. Articles of Incorporation for the USTA North Atlanta League were filed with the state, bylaws were created, and the first Officers were approved under the leadership of Andy Bigelow.

1983 - There were already 50,000 players, and all 17 USTA Sections were involved in the young league program.

1984 - Senior play begins in Atlanta, allowing men and women ages 55 and older to participate. Always the leader, the Southern Tennis Association (now called the USTA Southern Section) invited the winning senior teams to compete in the Southern Sectionals in Lexington, Kentucky. Volvo became the new sponsor of the league program. The 4.0 level was created, and the 5.0 level replaced the 5.5 level.

1986 - For the first time, the USTA hired verifiers for competition and instituted a disqualification process.

1988 - Southern League Coordinator and future USTA Atlanta volunteer Lisa Barry served on the first USTA national committee to test various computer rating programs and help develop the NTRP Computer Rating System. The committee eventually developed a user-friendly system and officially became the NTRP Computer Sub Committee. Lisa's husband and local volunteer, Mike Barry, wrote the first computer program to schedule the junior league in Atlanta. The program nicknamed "Mikey" was a huge success and was adopted by the North Atlanta League in 1989. Prior to "Mikey," scheduling the league required closing the office for two weeks to manually schedule each level and division. The total time to schedule with "Mikey" was 20 minutes. Donna Ship computed all NTRP ratings in the office, wrote procedure books for running the leagues, ran the office, handled scheduling before "Mikey," and served as the Local League Coordinator.

1989 - Compu Rank was adopted to help generate ratings based on match scores. The program was nothing like the TennisLink program that followed. Compu Rank was an automated telephone system that took at least five minutes to enter one scorecard. The decade ends with 125,000 league players nationwide.

The 90s

1990 - The USTA officially changed the name to USTA League Tennis. Mary Jane Bradley took over as the Local League Coordinator in Atlanta. A 2.5 men's team from Tucker, Georgia, became Atlanta's first team to win a National Championship. If you wanted to play USTA league tennis, you had to sign up for a verification clinic to receive an official rating. Future players would wait for their scheduled time in front of the pros in order to show off their on-court abilities (or attempt to hide them). By the mid-nineties, over 3,000 people were verified each year.

1991 - USTA officially adopts the Senior League as a national program with 3.0, 3.5, 4.0, and 4.5 levels of play. The 2.5 men's team and the Senior 4.5 women's team from Brookhaven Country Club win National Championship titles.

1993 - A 2.5 men's team from Alpharetta, Georgia, wins a National Championship.

1995 - The operating name changed to USTA League Atlanta. The office included three paid staff members and twelve volunteers who worked together to deliver the league programs. The Business Women's league was established. Mary Jane Bradley retired as LLC and was replaced by Cathy Trentacosta. Before TennisLink, all match scoring was done in the office by hand. Scorecards were numbered and placed in the captain's packet, along with the match schedules for each team. It took the staff and volunteers at least two weeks to process everything for 1,000 teams. After each match, scorecards were mailed to the office, while scores were checked before being processed by the data entry staff.

1996 - USTA League Atlanta hires an Executive Director to lead the organization's expansion into other areas of tennis. Under the guidance of the Executive Director, League Atlanta added numerous tennis programs, both under the auspices of the USTA and outside of USTA, all in local venues within our metro Atlanta community. Total participation for USTA League Tennis in Atlanta reached 20,000 players.

1999 - USTA League Atlanta changed its name to the Atlanta Community Tennis Association (ACTA) to reflect the USTA's desire to strengthen local community tennis associations and help us promote tennis through various programs. The headquarters moved into 3,000 square feet of office space in Norcross,

Georgia. The Atlanta Community Tennis Association runs the most extensive USTA adult league tennis program in the nation. The organization offers additional non-USTA programs that include men and women of all age groups, children and high school students, and local pro-players. New programs emerge, such as the Pro-Challenge, Pre-Collegiate League, and the Singles League. Mixed Doubles becomes a national program with local, sectional and regional championships. The USTA Southern Section, always the innovator, started the mixed doubles league earlier in the decade and already had playoffs. The 3.0 men from Alpharetta, Georgia, won the National Championships. USTA Atlanta partnered with the Greater Atlanta Inner-City Games (GAICG) to offer organized tennis lessons and play for youngsters exposed to other non-traditional sports in the inner city of Atlanta. The program included year-round free lessons for hundreds of youngsters at area schools and recreation centers through internal funding and grants from foundations like the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation and the GAICG. These lessons were part of the after-school program available to children in the inner city of Atlanta, where they find enriching activities and learning opportunities in a safe, secure environment. Tennis provided an opportunity for these children to develop sportsmanship, discipline, integrity, and interpersonal-relationship skills, all the things they need to succeed in life, as they learn to play the “game for a lifetime” together.

The 2000s and Beyond

2000 - Years in the planning, TennisLink becomes a reality and allows for automated score input. Ten USTA Sections adopted the program.

2001 - Dynamic ratings were launched. USTA Southern Section went online with TennisLink after waiting until internet input capability and geographic scheduling became a part of the program.

2002 - Verifications ended, and Self Ratings began. Due to the change in the program, participation in Atlanta exploded to 32,617 total league players. National participation reached half a million. Key volunteer, Adwynna MacKenzie, began a two-year term as the Local League Coordinator.

2003 - A milestone for USTA Atlanta as total participation in all USA League Tennis programs surpassed 40,000 players. USTA Atlanta formed a youth foundation to help meet the needs of under-served children in the Metro Atlanta area. The mission was to promote higher education and combat truancy, juvenile delinquency, and teen violence by utilizing skills derived from the game of tennis through after-school sports programs, leadership development programs, and advanced skill development programs.

2004 - USTA Atlanta was awarded the Community Tennis Association of the Year by USTA Georgia, USTA Southern, and the USTA. They also receive the Special Tennis Event of the Year. Kelly Michelson became the newest Local League Coordinator. Matt Olsen was hired as the USTA Atlanta Executive Director.

2005 - USTA Atlanta created the “Laurie Futrell Spirit of Tennis Award” in honor of longtime volunteer Laurie Futurell. The first recipient of the award was Martha Buttorff, who helped form the first teams in the USTA league and served as our second president. The second annual “Spirit of Tennis Award” was given to Mac MacDougal for his outstanding leadership and service. The new Dave FM Corporate began its first season with 24 teams in the summer and a smaller fall season. USTA Atlanta receives the Atlanta Falcons Community Quarterback Award.

2006 - USTA Atlanta participation once again surpasses the 40,000 mark. Beyond our successful USTA League programs, we offered a comprehensive menu of programs for seniors, adults, and juniors. Another highlight for our USTA League programs was our City Championships. Three thousand players and spectators enjoyed the long day of competition at DeKalb Tennis Center. USTA Atlanta capped off the year by being recognized as the USTA Member Organization of the Year and received the “Best of Atlanta” award from Atlanta Sports and Fitness.

2007 - Chris Walling was named Local League Coordinator. USTA Atlanta was named the USTA National Organization of the Year.

2008 - USTA Atlanta office is established in Dunwoody.

2009 - Chris Walling, Director of Adult Leagues, wins the USTA Georgia LLC of the Year award and the USTA Southern LLC of the Year award.

2010 - Karen Zuidema was hired as Director of Junior Leagues. USTA Atlanta took over Atlanta Tennis Association for Kids, and Junior Team Tennis (JTT) was formed.

2011 - Tennis Apprentice program was introduced, and the first season was offered at Piedmont Park. "Praise!" the tennis program began and lasted 2.5 years. USTA Atlanta worked with each participating church recreation location to design the league's schedule, curriculum, and structure around the needs of that location. USTA Atlanta's goal for this league was to properly teach children ten and under the game of tennis by implementing specific guidelines. These guidelines incorporated a specific lesson plan to develop the children's physical, mental, and emotional maturity. Spiritual lesson plans could also be implemented into the curriculum at the discretion of the participating location. Each location was supplied with a ten and under coach, ten and under tennis equipment, information, and training to run a self-sustaining ten and under league. "Praise!" tennis was 100% customizable in catering to the participating facility's schedule, needs, and desires. Maegan Kulich named Local League Coordinator.

2012 - USTA GA and Southern Member Organization of the Year. We were the first league to run a season under the new USTA National Age Restructuring changes. 8U Division was added to junior play.

2013 - Inaugural season (summer) of the Red Hare Brewing Company Tennis League. USTA Atlanta partners with Atlanta Track Club and has a presence at the Peachtree Road Race. AYTEF wins the USTA Georgia NJTL Chapter of the Year Award.

2014 - Maegan Kulich, Director of Adult Leagues, wins the USTA Georgia LLC of the Year award and the USTA Southern LLC of the Year Award. Cee Jai Jones, AYTEF, wins the USTA Georgia Richard C. Botsch Educational Merit Award.

2015 - Chris Bryce becomes the new Executive Director of USTA Atlanta. AYTEF wins the USTA Georgia NJTL Chapter of the Year Award. Kristina Felton takes the reigns as AYTEF Executive Director. JTT 3-Day State Qualifier event introduced as the second advancing season of Junior Team Tennis. Previously, only the advanced teams from the summer season qualified for the state championships. With this event, we were able to qualify intermediate and advanced level teams. This event was introduced to get more advanced players involved in Junior Team Tennis. Amanda Hunt was named Junior League Coordinator.

2016 - Jordan Dean was hired as Impact Coordinator, and Chris Clayton was hired as Program Coordinator.

2017 - AYTEF's Volley Against Violence Atlanta wins USTA Georgia's Special Tennis Event of the Year Award. USTA Atlanta Adult League boundaries expand to include Douglas County and Paulding County (east of Hwy 61).

2018 - Tuesday Tennis on the Turf launches at The Battery Atlanta during spring break and continues over the summer. This event brought free tennis instruction on the green space at The Battery to juniors. We had local tennis pros, USTA Atlanta volunteers, and USTA Atlanta staff come out and help make this event happen. Amanda Hunt, Director of Junior Leagues, wins the USTA Georgia LLC of the Year award and the USTA Southern LLC of the Year Award. USTA Atlanta's Tennis on the Turf wins the Special Tennis Event of the Year Award from USTA Georgia. The Junior Team Tennis summer season format changed to single-gender. Previously, the summer season was coed, but we now offered a girl's league and a boy's league. All players received t-shirts to "kick-off" the new summer format. In the fall, the West Cobb League was introduced for 10U and 12U teams as frustrations with ALTA travel prompted John Irvin, a tennis pro in the Acworth area, to approach us with the idea. Jordan Dean was promoted to the first Director of Marketing role. Andrew Shahan began his role as Executive Director of Atlanta Youth Tennis and Education Foundation. USTA Atlanta office moved to Peachtree Corners, GA.

2019 - Amy O'Connell becomes the new Executive Director of USTA Atlanta. Harriette Lynch receives the President's Award from USTA Georgia.

2020 - The pandemic shuts down USTA play from March to June. Singles Ladder is introduced once play resumed in June. The ladder saw immediate success in the tennis community. This program provided an easy way for adult players to schedule matches with opponents of the same level in a convenient location. This program uses the TennisRungs application. State, Sectional, and National Championships were canceled. Most local championships were held at higher-seeded teams' home courts. Maegan Kulich, Director of Adult Leagues, wins the USTA Georgia LLC of the Year award. Torrey Hawkins was hired as the Atlanta Youth Tennis and Education Foundation Executive Director.

2021 - USTA Atlanta named Community Tennis Association of the Year by USTA Georgia. Adult league participation grew by 2,000 players. Red Hare grew to an average of 1,000 players per season. The JTT 3 Day Qualifier had 300 players participate; making it the largest USTA Atlanta event. The Singles Ladder averaged 300 players per season, and over 100 singles matches per week were being played. It was a year of growth for the organization and a direct result of the planning and preparation of the board and staff to get players back on the court safely and efficiently. Debbie Kennedy was named Executive Director of AYTEF.