

Sisters woman hits the court

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Pat Vandewater of Sisters recently returned to her Pine Meadow home from Orlando, Florida, after her Athletic Club of Bend women's tennis team placed fifth in the United States Tennis Association National Championships, representing the Pacific Northwest region of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

Vandewater started her competitive tennis career as a member of the Madison High School tennis team in Portland when they won the City championship. After school she put her tennis racquet away and didn't bring it out again until her early 40s while living in Seattle. She and her husband, Doug Croce, played for fun in local outdoor parks and while wintering in Palm Desert in their 27-foot Winnebago. In the desert, Vandewater was a member of two different teams, playing every day and sometimes twice a day.

With their motorhome, they met up with friends made in Palm Desert to camp and play tennis. One such gathering occurred in Shasta City, California, where Vandewater, at age 63, played five matches between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. in 105-degree heat. After that, Vandewater said her tolerance for playing in the heat was greatly diminished.

Over 10 summers, Doug and Pat built their house in Camp Sherman's Metolius Meadows. They found time to play tennis with friends on the two tennis courts in the development. Their three children, two daughters and a son, worked at Black Butte Ranch during those summers. When they moved into their Sage Meadow home in Sisters, their son attended Sisters High School for his last two years and played basketball for the Outlaws.

They joined the Athletic Club of Bend and Pat pursued her competitive doubles tennis as a 3.5 player (based on the USTA graded scale from 2.0 – 5.0). She has now moved up to 4.0 and plays and competes with partners and a team she truly enjoys. She is a member of the Super Seniors (65+), and Vandewater says she is "the superest of all 'cuz I'm 73."

In 2018, their team won the Southern Oregon League which includes Ashland, Medford, Salem, Eugene, and Bend. They then played in the PNW sectionals but didn't progress any further. In 2019, the eight-woman team won their league and then the sectionals, which were played last September at Sunriver. That meant they got to represent the PNW at the National Championships in January 2020 in Orlando on clay courts. Every year the championships alternate between Orlando on clay and Surprise, Arizona on hard courts.

Vandewater said for five months of 2019, her full-time focus was on tennis. Her husband acted as her coach, drilling her on skill sets like lobs, and overhead and drop shots. She also participated in once-a-week clinics run by club staff and team practices at the Athletic Club of Bend. Fortunately, Vandewater's current home is adjacent to the Pine Meadow tennis courts, making fair-weather practices very handy.

Not used to playing on

clay courts, the team arrived in Orlando four days before the tournament to allow time for practice. Vandewater said that by the third day they were acclimated to playing on clay.

At the end of the first day of the tournament, the PNW representatives had won two matches against Texas (Dallas) and Eastern (New York) and were in second place. On Saturday their two matches were delayed by rain and high winds. They finally played one match at 10 p.m. on damp clay, losing to Florida. Most of the other teams were able to play both of their matches on Saturday.

The Bend team made it back to their rooms by midnight to be up at 5 a.m. for a 7 a.m. match against Southern California, who had won the championship the previous year. By beating Southern California, they were tied for fourth place with Northern California. The final positions



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Pat Vandewater traveled to Florida for competitive tennis action.

were determined by looking at the number of tournament sets won – they were tied. The total number of games won was the deciding factor – Northern California 132, PNW 129, putting PNW in fifth place.

Vandewater was very impressed with the USTA National Tennis Center which covers 64 acres with 100 courts.

"I enjoyed testing my skills against a variety of challenges including the weather, a new

playing surface, and playing against a variety of different people," Vandewater said. "It was a week spent with a grand group of women. I just absorbed the whole experience."

When asked how long she plans on playing competitive tennis, Vandewater responded, "I'm grateful for every day I wake up and can go on the court. I want to play into my 90s." She did add, "I'm at the stage now, I'm just really happy hitting the ball."

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