

SPORTS

Courtly love

Team Portland has a handle on a racket that attracts queer tennis players and gay dollars

BY SARAH SWANSON

The Louisiana-Pacific Tennis Center at the University of Portland resounds with the thwack of hard-hit tennis balls every Sunday from 8 a.m. till noon. That's when Team Portland Tennis Association, Portland's only gay and lesbian tennis team, gets together for practicing and socializing each week.

"This is what I look forward to on weekends," says Fidel Garcia, a six-year member of Team Portland. Many of his teammates agree. "It's awesome," says Eric Hunter, who started playing tennis regularly a year and a half ago when he joined the team. "It's really great people doing active, healthy things...and having fun."

Team Portland has between 50 and 60 members, with roughly 30 of those members regularly attending Sunday practices, says Kim Bauske, Team Portland co-president. She explains that team members compete at a variety of levels, from the most competitive Open and A levels down through the B, C and D levels. If a player wins two or more tournaments in a year in his or her division, that player must move up a level.

The team's larger context is the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance, an international organization that manages the queer tennis circuit. The GLTA sanctions about 25 tournaments a year and ranks more than 3,500 gay and lesbian tennis players.

A few of Team Portland's members are GLTA ranked, including partners Tom Barreto and Brian Sinclair, who met three years ago during the Rose City Open Tournament, which was sponsored by Team Portland. Both Barreto and Sinclair are ranked in the top 200 singles players, and Barreto and his mixed-doubles partner are the fifth-ranked mixed-doubles team in the GLTA.

Sinclair and Barreto are two of Team Portland's most competitive members, going to five or more tournaments a year. "We hit most of the West Coast tournaments," says Barreto. West Coast tournaments include the U.S. Gay Open in San Francisco, the San Diego Open, the Evergreen Tennis Championships in Seattle, the Rose City Open in Portland, and the Palm Springs Open.

Sinclair and Barreto also practice much more often than just the Sunday Team Portland practices. "When we are staying together," says Sinclair (who lives in Vancouver, B.C., but spends summers in Portland), "we probably practice at least three or four times a week."

While there are other Team Portland members who join Barreto and Sinclair in the highly competitive Open and A divisions, the majority of members play in the B, C and D levels.

"It's great," says Allen Vandehey, a three-year Team Portland member who competes at the C level. "I've met a lot of great friends and I have fun playing tennis."

Co-presidents and partners Kim Bauske and Karen Frangos work hard to make the team fun and welcoming. Frangos stresses the camaraderie among team members, noting

that there is "no animosity between the men and the women." Team Portland's roster boasts a fairly even number of male and female members, she adds.

Frangos also notes the high level of involvement in Team Portland specifically and the GLTA in general. "Most of the time, tennis is not considered a 'gay' sport," she says. "But there's a huge number of people in the GLTA."

There are also quite a few GLTA tournaments. In addition to those sanctioned by the GLTA, many teams get together and play against each other in smaller tournaments.

Recently, Team Portland competed in Seattle against the Seattle Tennis Alliance and the Vancouver Tennis Association in the Northwest Cup, an annual event hosted in rotation by one of the three teams each year.

Instead of competing individually, each Northwest Cup participant competes for his or her team. For every match won, a team

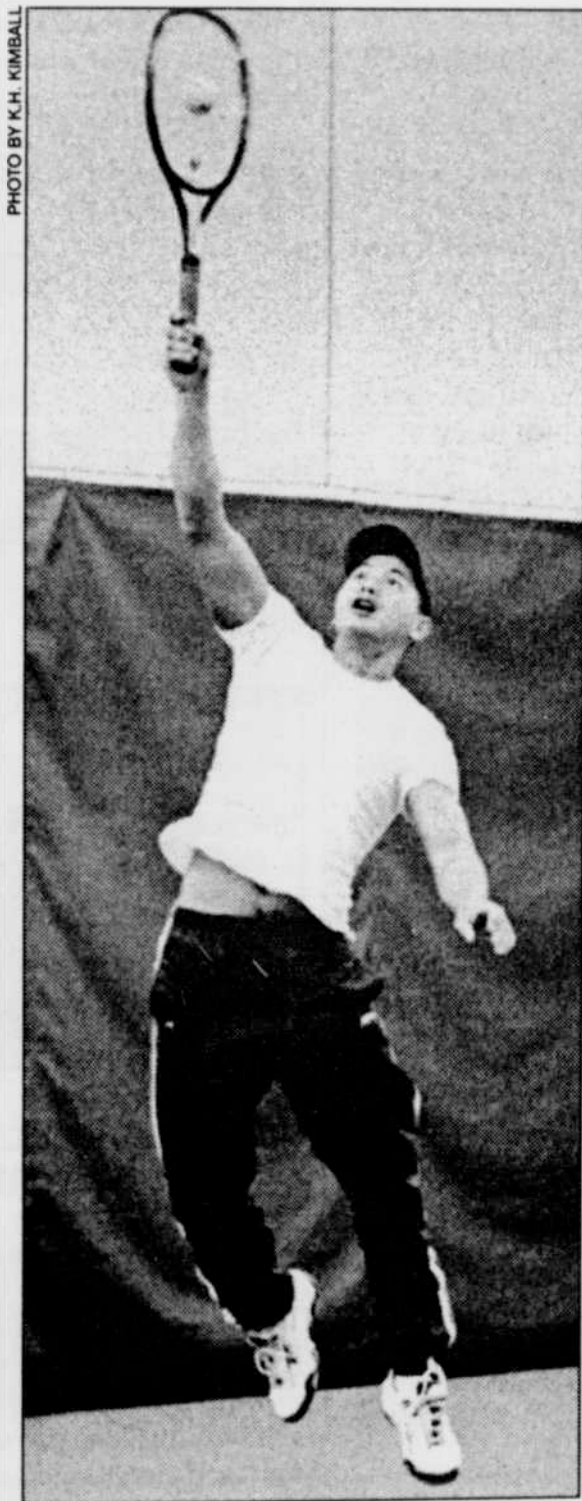
scores a point. Seattle took the top honors with 16 points, Team Portland came in second with 13 points, and Vancouver finished with 10 points.

Over the upcoming Labor Day weekend, Sept. 4 to 6, Team Portland will sponsor the eighth annual Rose City Open, in which players compete individually. In years past, the tournament has drawn as many as 300 players.

According to Bauske, the Rose City Open attracts a larger audience than any other Portland tennis tournament. "Gay dollars are really talking," she boasts.

"This is really a great tournament," says Bauske. "A lot of people don't want to miss it, and look forward to it all year."

■ For more information on becoming a member of TEAM PORTLAND TENNIS ASSOCIATION, contact Alex Godinez at (503) 282-7210.



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