Yale Tennis Association Annual Dinner
Celebrating 40 Years of Women’s Tennis at Yale

Friday, April 29, 2011

Yale Club of New York
50 Vanderbilt Avenue
New York City
As President of the Yale Women’s Tennis Association, I have had the privilege of continuing to be involved with the incredible women who played on Yale’s tennis team. In the last 40 years, the team has evolved from a club to one of the top varsity programs in the country. Yet, even with all the differences, there is a consistent message that you will discover as you read through this book. Each of us has our unique experiences but we all share the same passion for our teammates, for Yale and for the opportunity to be part of the Yale tennis tradition.

Congrats to the 2010-2011 team on an amazing season!

Lisa Gollob Finke ’87

The four of us were assigned to Room # 864 in Branford College. We discovered we all played tennis. Melissa and Kathy had played at Wellesley and Linda and Francie at Smith, before transferring to Yale in the fall of 1969. We assumed Yale would have a tennis team for women. Yale assumed we would arrive and tell them what we wanted. So, there was nothing organized and nothing in place. But we had the nucleus of a team with four.

The first spring was tentative. Trying to find the tennis players among the women scattered around the colleges and Old Campus. Trying to figure out who and where in the administration the authority for a team resided. And then there was the Bobby Seale trial, the Black Panthers and the disruption of campus in the spring. Nothing really got started.

By the spring of 1971, we had a team, and some recognition from the administration, including a coach, Dottie O’Connor. Martha Wasson Magoon was another senior on our team. There were others, underclassmen, and we sought the status and organization we saw with the men’s team.

We had a “spring training trip” to Miami. Thanks to Melissa’s father and his connections with alumni, we had some funding for the trip. We stayed and played at Barry College for a few days, feeling something like aliens on this small campus in the sun. We had no uniforms, no budget, scrounged for practice balls and had a locker room at Payne Whitney but played at the courts at the Yale Bowl. We played a match against Princeton which was undefeated and had a nationally ranked player at the top. We were quickly dispatched. Of course, that was the match the New York Times reported. Our teammates and successors went on to more competitive and more successful seasons. We just got the ball rolling…

But, we also had great fun and a camaraderie that held us together. We are still great friends today.

At the end of the first season, we were awarded “club sport” letters. We think it is time for “varsity” letters.

Melissa Dempsey Gerrity ’71
Kathy Bennett Solley (Friedrichs) ’71
Francie dePeyster (Moulton) ’71
Linda Kent Boothby ’71

Hard to believe that Yale Women’s Tennis is 40! It seems like yesterday that Margaret Mercer et al were hitting the court (I was a lowly alternate/manager). And wow, what fabulous facilities Yale has now! Ach, to be able to do it all over again. The women there now are so fortunate.

Have a great dinner.

Aina Julianna Gulya Wilson, MD, FACS ’74
I had the good fortune to begin my 4 year career on the Yale women’s tennis team in the spring of 1971. Even in four brief years the women’s tennis program underwent many changes: moving from a part-time coach from the local community to a dedicated coach with experience playing college tennis at a great program, spring break trips to Florida, playing a tournament with the men’s team at Dartmouth and the building of the indoor courts. But most of all I am grateful that playing on the team enabled me to connect with other women who shared my love for tennis, especially Linden, Betsy, Sally and Lisa. Hope to see everyone at a future tennis reunion.

Margaret Mercer Pfister ’74

The Yale tennis team provided a special community. It offered the discipline of competition and sport but also much more. My teammates were interesting, engaging, and fun. We learned from each other, had special times and remain in touch over thirty years later. It was an invaluable part of my wonderful years at Yale, and I will always be grateful for the experience.

Lisa Rosenblum ’75

I came to Yale in the second year of coeducation, and recall the gap between the resources available to the men’s and women’s team. In these days before Title IX was actively enforced, no one, including all of us, thought to question a system which was separate and unequal. My recollection was that there was no ladies room or locker facility for women at the courts, and our coach was a well meaning physical education teacher from a local school who provided ice tea and said good shot when appropriate. What’s striking to me now is how little of it was striking to me then. It was just how life was. I now teach and write about issues of gender discrimination as a faculty member at Stanford, and sometimes show my class a video that portrays efforts by the women’s crew team to get locker facilities where they practiced. What turned the tide was inviting a reporter to cover a meeting with the head of women’s athletics. The team arrived with title IX painted on their backs and removed their shirts for the photo opportunity. The picture ran on the front page of the Times and women got a locker room with showers shortly thereafter. In my years on the tennis team, we were too well behaved for anything similar.

Deborah L. Rhode ’77, JD ’79

As Yale administrators liked to tell us back in 1973, ours was the first class of entering freshman which included a full complement of women. It still didn’t feel like very many of us, so afternoon tennis practices under New Haven’s bright blue autumn skies were a welcome respite; not only from labs & lectures, but also the omnipresence of young men.

One factor which attracted me to Yale over my other college acceptances was the personal letter from Coach Judy Dixon inviting me to try out for Women’s tennis upon my arrival on campus. It turned out that my growing as a member of the tennis team would parallel lessons learned in the classroom, for which public high school had left me under-prepared. For example, how to write a 5-page paper worthy of a grade better than B, which I’d never before received in my scholastic career. Similarly, when Coach Dixon designated me JV Team Captain, I discovered I didn’t have the slightest idea how to be a leader among peers. This was one of many challenges encountered my first year at Yale.

Back at the residential colleges, I enjoyed status accruing to the physically adept, as I sauntered into the Morse College dining hall for dinner after practice, still energized by the adrenaline of physical exertion. Tennis whites made me stand out in the crowd, and helped to cement myself identity as a “student athlete” rather than just another science nerd. It sticks in mind when a fellow co-ed came up and admired, “I can tell you must be an athlete because your left wrist is so much larger than your right.” Never afraid to be “a little different”, my being seen as a tennis jock was a source of pride.
At the end of my sophomore year, during which I’d barely managed to squeeze onto the varsity squad, I resolved to work on my game. Conveniently, during my stay on campus to attend Yale’s Summer Language Institute, tennis lessons were offered at the clay courts. Facing months of intensive study in a dorm room lacking air conditioning, tennis became my main outlet. Gradually, my game did improve; so much so that by August it definitely was letter-worthy. My new command of the ball and racket gave great mental & physical satisfaction. That Fall, sure enough I gained a coveted singles slot, on a team which other than our traditional nemesis of Princeton remained undefeated all season.

In closing I’d like to say “Hi” to my former teammates, and thank them for sharing in the creation of a lifetime of great memories!
Holly Hartman ’77, Ph.D. ’82

I have fond memories of playing on Cullman courts in the mid-1970s. Loved the camaraderie of the team, the opportunity to get to know women from all 4 years and learned a lot from the coach.
J. Weili Cheng ’77

I played tennis at Yale from 1997-78 - on Varsity from sophomore year on. I loved playing tennis at Yale - especially playing at the Yale Bowl. I played doubles, usually with Val Tebbetts. We had a lot of laughs and occasionally even played well together. I had the privilege of playing for Judy Dixon, who became a friend in addition to teacher, mentor, and coach. I was very active in the Women’s Athletic Association; I was one of the founders and served as the first President. We were active in organizing a Title IX complaint against Yale for sex discrimination in athletics. It was fun traveling to other schools to play tournaments. I still have the orange tee-shirt from the Ivy League-Seven Sisters tournament at Smith College in 1977!
Abbe Smith ’78

Congratulations to the Yale women’s tennis team for 40 great years! The tennis team was a memorable experience for me during my years at Yale from 1974-1978. We played under Coach Judy Dixon for three years and then Chris Swenson for my last year. Every spring break, we had the privilege of traveling to either California or Florida to play in matches against very highly ranked national teams. After college, I did try my hand on the pro circuit, playing in the Avon Futures and the qualifying rounds for several of the main pro tournaments. But the primary benefit of playing for the Yale tennis team was the friendships I developed with some of the other players. I still keep in touch with a couple of them, even though we have lived in different parts of the country. I will cherish the memories I have from participating on the Yale women’s tennis team! Go Bulldogs!
Anne Seidler Lehigh ’78

Tennis taught me contemplation; the ability to assess deeply my actions, and their consequences, and to embrace the journey of self-improvement. As a competitive junior, I traveled the nation playing for the “ranking” that would define me and my talent in a coterie of competitors. There was no shortage of pain or pressure inspired by the tournament tours and the loneliness of flight. None of this prepared me, however, for the dichotomy of forces at play in college tennis. On a singles court, I remained the lonely gladiator. The pressure of solo fight, nonetheless, was exponentially enhanced by the team that depended upon my victory. With this experience, I secured the understanding of responsibility to others; my triumph or loss could no longer be celebrated or mourned in solitude, but would dictate the emotions of others for whom I cared deeply. My journey began with racquet in hand; my character built with court under feet and my sense of duty refined by the sound of my Yale teammates loudly cheering.
Lynn Tilton ’81
I wish to thank Yale tennis, my teammates and Coach Tym. I would like to add a special thanks to the Women’s Tennis Coach during my freshman year, Christopher Swenson! I will always cherish my many fond memories of all our great times together, the friendships, camaraderie, the thrilling team victories, and team dinners at my college, Calhoun. I am deeply honored to have had the opportunity to play for Yale for four glorious years in which we were able to win for the Bulldogs two Ivy League Championships. 

Natalya Smith ’81

I was a walk on my freshman year. Having always played on a team, I would have had no idea what to do with every afternoon without practice. The team practices and matches were time consuming, but rewarding as my game and conditioning improved. I feel that because the team severely limited the amount of hours available for assignments and studying, it forced me to focus on a task completely and to be far more productive with my time. This is certainly still the case for me. Most importantly, the tennis team provided a great way to meet women from other classes and from other colleges. It was a small, cohesive group, with strong personalities, and strong bonds. Congratulations on winning the Ivies! I am proud to have been on the team. So much so, that I still my faded, but beloved, team sweatshirt from many years ago.

Wendy Fischl Beattie ’86

I played on the JV team in 1983 and remember the enjoyment of practices on golden autumn afternoons and playing a match at Dartmouth during snow flurries. I think our coach was named Peter Martin. Unfortunately, I twisted my ankle on a loose ball lying in the back of the court and therefore ended my tennis effort during my freshman year. I never played with the team again, but I did play intramurals. I still play tennis, love my tennis friends, and participate on USTA Teams in the Baltimore vicinity.

Laura Spadone ’87

Getting to practice somehow (running, the shuttle bus or, when lucky, someone’s car), the leaves changing, wondering if the locker rooms always smelled so bad, figuring out how many things is the max that you can get on your pin to be washed -- do you think they’ll wash my jeans?, team runs in California, spring break in Palm Springs (thank goodness we got 2 weeks), road trips to the other Ivies, cheering on teammates, can we please design our own uniforms-- who picks these?, banquets at Morry’s, friendships that remain strong forever.....

Lisa Gollob Finke ’87

It was extremely fun and meaningful to get to grow and learn and play out on the court with other amazing women on the Yale JV Tennis Team. I really appreciated the opportunity to be part of the women’s tennis program. I toast all the women who have won and lost and sweat and cheered and played lo these four decades. Boola Boola!

Carrie Hatcher-Kay ’89
Playing on the Yale women’s tennis team (1985-1989) was a highlight of my Yale experience. It introduced me to the joys of playing and competing in a team sport. Tennis is truly a sport for a lifetime, and I still play on USTA league teams with some Yale teammates now, trying to replicate my college experience. Most importantly, many teammates are among my closest friends over 20 years later and have helped guide and support me through important milestones along the way.

Elizabeth Baldwin ’89

I considered playing on the JV tennis team the “3rd leg” of the stool of my Yale experience: studying, socializing and playing tennis. Playing tennis was a great way to bond with a dynamic group of young women, clear my mind after hours of studying and work off the byproduct of too many late nights at Demery’s, Naples, etc.

I have fond memories of jogging out to the tennis courts from the dorms; knocking the ball around with teammates; strategizing about how to get the “SmartFood” company to sponsor the team; and road trips to the other Ivy schools for matches.

While I may no longer remember much of what I learned in Chinese history class or statistics, I still remember how to smack a ball across the court — albeit with less topspin and significantly less grace!

Marla Grossman ’90

Tennis was a huge part of my Yale experience, yet my fondest memories are of the times spent with my teammates off the court — the long and entertaining bus rides to matches, our favorite meals at each Ivy campus, celebrating my 21st birthday on Spring Break in Sedona talking into the night with my teammates, and the raucous team banquets at Mory’s after a long season. Before Yale, tennis for me was solely an individual endeavor, but at Yale, the camaraderie of playing on a team let me experience the sport in an entirely new way and ultimately gave me friendships that I still treasure. Thank you Yale Tennis!

Lynn Rosenstrach ’91

I was able to continue to play a game I loved to play every day and to be part of a terrific team of women. I received advice, support, and friendship. I made so many special friends, some who have remained amongst my closest friends in life.

Aimee Altschul-Latzman ’92

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to play on the Yale women’s varsity tennis team. I learned a lot about tennis, but I learned even more about life.

Laura (Flynn) Baldini ’92

It has been sixteen years since I played a tennis match at Cullman Courts, but I still hold very fond memories of my Yale Women’s Tennis Team experience. Without a doubt, I spent critical formative years surrounded by an extraordinary group of women on the Yale Women’s Tennis Team; stretching and lifting weights at Payne Whitney Gym; attending my first college party as an “innocent” freshman; riding the bus with the Yale Football team; jammin’ to U2 with my girls in California during Spring Break; meeting the cutest boy ever on Crenshaw Boulevard in L.A.; meeting celebrities like Sally Struthers and River Phoenix while making the rounds as part of the L.A. night scene; drinking at Mory’s with teammates as part of annual awards; having my teammates unbraid my hair and revel in my afro; celebrating any time Yale beat Harvard or those other Ivies; and playing with the most fabulously diverse women as far as women’s tennis teams go. I understand that I may have been the second ever Black woman to play...
on the Yale Women’s tennis team. This fact has always inspired me and served as a reminder of exactly how privileged I was to be a part of this group of women. I know that the woman I am today was shaped and nurtured by the successes that I achieved and setbacks that I suffered while playing on the Yale Women’s Tennis Team. Here’s to forty years!

Ngozi C. Okorafor ’95

When I think about my experience as a Yale Tennis player the most profound memories for me all revolve around the same theme: the team. The minute I stepped on the Yale campus and became a Yale Tennis player, tennis changed from an individual sport to a team sport. After 10 years of competing regionally and nationally solo, suddenly I was part of something bigger, where winning and losing was not only about your performance but the performance of the entire team. It made tennis more fun that it ever had been in juniors and brought a camaraderie to the sport that I had always longed for. My best college memories are those I had with the amazing group of women who were Yale Tennis: the memories on the court, the memories on the road, and the memories of doing everything together — competing, studying, partying, laughing, fighting, and confiding in each other. These are the memories that defined my college experience, that helped define me and they are memories that I will never forget. Yale Tennis also introduced me to my best friend and I cannot imagine life without her.

Today I have a seven year old daughter and another child on the way and I hope for both of them that one day they will have the opportunity to experience the joys of a college team (maybe even Yale!) the way I did.

Sara Naison-Phillips ’99 Captain

Separated by 10+ years, continents and oceans, significant life events and more — yet it’s like we haven’t missed a beat. Some bonds are too strong to be broken. The words “friend” and “teammate” barely begin to describe what we mean to each other. Yale Women’s Tennis is a magical and unique experience that we are beyond lucky to have shared (and to continue to share) with each other. I am thankful to have been a part of it.

From ’97 to ’03, I actively miss all of you every day.

Barbara Ellis ’00

When I reminisce about my tennis days at Yale, so many endearing moments come to mind. As a freshman, my team instantly became my family. With home being Hong Kong, having such a unique bond with my teammates was key to helping me through my transition to a different culture and way of life. I will never forget my first road trip and the task I was given when we approached a sketchy gas station next to a creepy motel. In Hong Kong every gas station is serviced, so I had absolutely no idea how to fill the tank. When I returned from the cashier after having memorized all the instructions, the van was gone! Minutes later my team van rolled up the driveway and I realized I had been the victim of a traditional freshman prank!

Looking at my wedding pictures and seeing five of my closest teammates surrounding me on my special day, I realize how much tennis was a part of my Yale experience. True friends are hard to find and even harder to keep. I am blessed to have found so many wonderful friends from being a part of Yale Women’s tennis.

Jacklyn Fu ’00
Spring, 2002: Some of my fondest memories from Yale are hanging out with the team on road trips. Here are two pictures from our trip to Dartmouth, which was the last match of my senior year. I don’t think I realized at the time the magnitude of this being the last college match I would play, and the last team road trip I would go on. At the time, it just seemed like another day, but looking back on it, this was the end of what was an amazing 4 years.

Liz Delasobera (Oosterhuis) ’02

When I think back on my four years on the tennis team, I don’t remember the scores of our matches, the pain of our early morning workouts, or who played whom during our six hour indoor matches at Cullman, but instead I think fondly of laughing, singing, and cheering with all of my teammates. I will always treasure the feeling of driving through New Haven with the whole team stuffed into Liz’s car after beating Princeton, the memory of YWT at the Enrique concert, and the songs we played on endless repeat in the vans during spring trip. I’m so thankful for the people with whom I spent those four years, both on and off the court, and for the lifelong friendships that I formed with my teammates. Boola, Boola!

Ashley Martin, ’04

These pictures capture some of my fondest memories of being part of the team at Yale- from long van rides on Spring Trips to winning ECACs. My teammates remain some of my closest friends, and I love that every time we reunite it seems as if no time has passed (though my tennis game, at least, suggests otherwise).

Karlyn Martin ’04

#1 2002:
- BACK ROW L TO R: REKHA NATRAJAN ’04, MEAGAN CALDWELL ’04, ANDREA GOLDBERG ’02, MARGARET PURCELL ’04, BIFFY KAUFMAN ’03, ASHLEY MARTIN ’04, KARLYN MARTIN ’04, LIZ OOSTERHUIS ’02, RESHMI SRINATH ’05
- FRONT ROW L TO R: SUSIE HINIKER ’03, STEPHANIE WHITE ’05, CHAD SKORUPKA

#2 2003: L TO R: SUSIE HINIKER ’03, BIFFY KAUFMAN ’03
What a great four years!! Yale tennis provided me with lifelong friendships, mental toughness, and a wonderful competitive spirit. It is something I will forever remember and I am excited to be here tonight celebrating 40 years of women’s tennis!

Stephanie White ’05

Stephanie White ’05 playing doubles with Biffy (Elizabeth) Kaufman ’03
More than anything, I really loved the community that we created through Yale Women’s Tennis. It made practices and traveling fun, and it added a supportive and welcoming element to our competitive spirit. We still get together to play and catch up, and it’s absolutely one of my favorite parts of my Yale experience.

*Juliette Vartikar, ’06*

Yale women’s tennis wasn’t just a 4 year experience it was creating memories and finding friends that’ll stay with me forever.

*Christine Alford ’07*

YWT 2007-2010 at the YTA dinner (Christine Cutter ’09, Olivia Nix ’07, Christine Alford ’07, Janet Kim ’09, Sarah Lederhandler ’10, Lilian Nguyen ’09, Karolina Grygierowska ’09, Lindsey Dashiel ’08, Jesse Rhee ’10, coaches Danielle Lund and Cristelle Fox).

YWT 2007-2010 at a Princeton meet in 2007 (L-R Jesse Rhee, Sarah Lederhandler, Karolina Grygierowska, Christine Alford, Olivia Nix, Lindsay Dashiel, Lilian Nguyen, Janet Kim, Christina Cutter).
40 YEARS OF YALE WOMEN'S TENNIS