



Jackson Hole, 2010

Submitted by the Gary Horvath / PPTA Professional

This season marks the 18th year of wire shots and wildlife at the RJR platform tennis camps. The wild west platform tennis experience began in 1992 when Dick Reilly installed courts outside of Whitefish, Montana. He hosted the Grizzly Affair, a tournament that catered to players who wanted to combine tournament play with skiing and a western hospitality.

Several years later, he moved the event north to Eureka, Montana where he added a series of week-long platform tennis camps. While several people lay claim to hosting the first paddle camps, the RJR Platform instructional series had a significant impact on the sport because they provided players with an opportunity to become immersed in a focused instructional environment for up to a week.

As a result, participants returned home with a newfound enthusiasm for the sport. They used their backhand volley more frequently, hit a stronger drive, and positioned themselves strategically at the net on every shot. And they began to win matches to players who had previously defeated them and it raised the level of play for their partners and opponents. This served as a much needed shot in the arm for the sport. Players began to recognize that quality instruction could enhance their enjoyment of the sport. In turn, this created opportunities for teaching professionals to expand their lesson programs at clubs across the country.

At one camp session in Eureka, Reilly initiated a discussion with professionals Hank Irvine and Gary Horvath about the need for an organization that certified teaching professionals. Both gentlemen had been members of the short-lived American Professional Platform Tennis Association during the 1970s and agreed with Reilly that the time was right to give such an organization another try.

By the time that camp session had ended, the trio identified a short-list of some of the individuals who could play a key role in the formation of a trade association of teaching professionals. Over the next couple of months Reilly placed calls to these individuals, an organizational meeting was set up, and the USA PPTA was subsequently formed on March 24, 2000.

While Reilly is most remembered for revolutionizing the sport by developing the aluminum courts, it should not be forgotten that he made a second and equally important contribution with his focus on the importance of quality instruction programs that would benefit both the players and the teaching professionals.

In 2000, the Reillys moved their camp to Jackson, Wyoming and shortened the time frame of a camp to four days (or eight 3-hour sessions). While all camp formats have their strengths, the Reilly camps distinguished themselves by providing an in-depth review of stroke production, wire play, tactics, positioning, court maintenance, rules, etiquette, and structured play to apply the information learned from the instruction sessions. To top off a great day on the courts, players would relax and reflect with visits to Jackson and the neighboring national parks.

While it is too late to be a part of the 2010 RJR Platform Tennis Camps, it isn't too late to start making plans for next year. Or you can start now and take advantage of instructional opportunities in your area. For additional information on the RJR camps, contact RJRRanch1@msn.com or call 307.699.2391. To find a certified professional in your neighborhood, click on the Find-A-Pro tab on the USA PPTA website at www.pptausa.com.