

History of Tennis in Mount Pearl

Tennis first started in Newfoundland in 1876 with the establishment of The Newfoundland Archery and Lawn Tennis Club that opened May 18th in St. John's (Graham, 211). The very first All Newfoundland Tennis championship was held in the 1930's, yet Mount Pearl had not established itself as a competitive team at that time. However, in 1946 "the Mount Pearl Tennis Club was producing its share of champions both in the Ladies and Men's divisions" (Graham, 211). In fact, in 1947 the tennis team from Mount Pearl claimed its first All-Newfoundland Championship; this team is part of the Mount Pearl Sports Team Honour Roll.

Keith Howse, a longtime member of the tennis community states that the first tennis courts in Mount Pearl were located on the corner of Spruce Avenue and Park Avenue. In the 1940's, tennis players would come from around the province to play on Mount Pearl's clay tennis field. By 1963 there were 3 tennis courts in Mount Pearl, all located at St. David's field on the corner of Ruth Avenue and First Street. These courts were run by the town of Mount Pearl, and as Mount Pearl grew so did the number of tennis courts. The establishment of Newtown in the mid 1970's around Ruby Line became a location for new tennis courts, as did the Yetman Drive when it was developed. Schools were also a prime location for the developing tennis community. Courts also surfaced in the Admiralty Wood area and there were also two courts off of Moores Drive. Today there are currently 17 tennis courts in 7 locations. All courts were considered satellite courts, and were run by the city. These new facilities are what made tennis what it is today. With the establishment of new courts, more individuals wanted to try the sport, and once they did, they fell in love with it. Prior to the formation of the Mount Pearl Tennis Club in 1982 there were only a mere 60 recreational players involved in tennis and there was a fairly good following at the junior level. In 1984 the club experienced a tremendous growth due to the establishment of new facilities; the club reached a following of over 750 members! The St. David's tennis facilities in the early 1980's were the best tennis facilities in the province. Mount Pearl had the best coaches and a number of strong, high ranking tennis athletes; Tols Chapman, Ralph Chapman, Dustin Cole and Mark Spurell just to name a few.

Tennis equipment has made a drastic change over the years as well. First players started with wooden rackets, which were then replaced by aluminum rackets, then graphite ones, then titanium ones with Kevlar (which replaced the pig intestine strings that once used to make the tennis racket). The price of equipment has also changed; In 1969 when Keith was a youngster working at Trapper's Irving, he spent his entire two weeks' worth of pay (\$66.00) to buy his first aluminum tennis racket, the Jimmy Connors R2000. That being said, tennis was one of the cheapest recreational sports one could participate in in Mount Pearl. It was a subsidized sport that cost junior athletes about \$20.00 for a yearlong membership and cost adults around \$60.00 for a yearlong membership. Moreover, the Mount Pearl Tennis Club was the first of tennis clubs to have the luxury of playing games at night. The club purchased lighting through government grants pushing them a major step forward in membership recruitment. Uniforms may have changed in style over the years, but tennis teams from Mount Pearl never went without them; they were always fortunate enough to have sponsors that provided them with uniforms.

One of the events that Keith claims was huge for the Mount Pearl Tennis Club was when Carling Basset (a 16 year old tennis player who was ranked the top player in Canada) played Mount Pearl's very own

Ralph Chapman; “ They were both phenomenal players”. The game demonstrated how incredibly talented these players were, how much fun they were having and showed the younger generation just how much they were missing! As Keith states, “Tennis is where you make lifelong friendships, that is how committed individuals are to the sport. Not only is it a game, but it’s a place to socialize with peers.”Once you start tennis, you just can’t stop!

Sources:

Keith Howse- One of the founding members of the Mount Pearl Tennis Club

Graham, Frank. *Ready...Set...Go!: A St. John's Sports Pictorial*. St. John's, NL: Creative Publishers, 1988. Print.