

Sioux Falls Park Becomes First To Build QuickStart Tennis Courts

Good things come in small packages. This adage couldn't be truer when talking about the innovative, new tennis courts at Spellerberg Park in Sioux Falls. What once was three full-size courts at this public park is now being converted to eight 36-foot or "short courts" designed specifically for QuickStart Tennis – a new format introduced by the USTA in March aimed at kids 10-and-under that shrinks the game to a more manageable size for smaller participants.

QuickStart incorporates smaller racquets, bigger foam or pressureless balls, shorter nets, and yes, shorter courts. A regulation court is 78-feet long and often too big for a beginning player. With "short courts," the size has been cut in half, allowing players to focus on hitting the ball, rather than chasing it down all the time.

Sioux Falls is one of the first communities in the United States, and the only one in USTA Northern, to actually build courts specifically for QuickStart Tennis as part of a pilot program through the USTA and the Section. **Jeff Nelson**, a tennis teaching professional at the Westward Ho Country Club, and **Mary Thompson**, the former USTA Northern president and executive director of the Sioux Falls Tennis Association, learned about the benefits of QuickStart Tennis through their work with the USTA and immediately led the charge to build courts in their community.

Knowing the courts at Spellerberg were rarely used in their current condition, Nelson and Thompson decided to go to the City of Sioux Falls with their "short court" idea.

Seeing how programs such as "micro soccer" and t-ball had worked in Sioux Falls the past 20 years, the City was very receptive to this innovative format hoping that even more kids would start play tennis.

The Sioux Falls Tennis Association (SFTA) then joined forces with USTA National (from whom they received \$20,000 as part of the pilot program) and USTA Northern (\$4,000). They also received \$5,000 from the City of Sioux

Falls and a majority of the remainder from the SFTA to fund this almost \$40,000 project. Although a majority of the financing is taken care of, the project still had its doubters.

"We really had to take the time and educate people," Thompson said. "We went to neighborhood associations and explained there is t-ball, mini soccer and flag football, so why wouldn't this make sense with tennis. We had to get them to be forward thinkers and convince them this was good for not only the city, but for their chil-



Before: The courts at Spellerberg Park were rarely used.

dren and grandchildren."


The eight new courts have permanent lines and net posts and are painted in the US Open blue and green color scheme - making them look like "real courts." In addition, the City is adding 60-foot court lines to the remaining 78-foot court for kids who are transitioning from QuickStart to regulation tennis.

"We will be able to get kids playing tennis at a younger age which is why this is a big deal," **Kirk Anderson**, USTA Director of recreational coaches and programs, said in the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*. "Kids will have fun playing tennis, rather than be frustrated in the younger stages."

Nelson and Thompson also see these courts benefitting senior players as well.

"The smaller court really lends itself to the older or once-injured player," Thompson said. "We are working

with the Center for Active Generations trying to get seniors back on the court. Even though they might have lost a step over the years, these smaller courts allow them to play and get moving again – just not as far."

For more information on how to build QuickStart Courts in your area, please contact **Becky Cantellano** in the USTA Northern office at cantellano@northern.usta.com or at (952) 358-3291 and for more information on QuickStart Tennis programs, visit www.quickstarttennis.com. 



After: With 8 new QuickStart courts, beginning players will keep these courts busy.