

# Aztec Tennis Reporter

Founded 1999 SERVING THE SAN DIEGO STATE TENNIS COMMUNITY Vol 7, No 2, 2005

## A Gentle Aztec Whose Career Defined Loyalty

The tennis lessons were a modest \$5 an hour but that was more than the eager teenager could afford.



"I'd make you a deal," said Powell Blankenship, the tall, sunburned instructor. "For every basket of balls you find me, I'd give you a lesson."

**Blankenship** The year was 1954. For a summer of instruction, the student searched alleys, climbed into gutters, scoured weed patches and parking lots, and came away with enough balls to develop a useful forehand.

Blankenship, his lower lip pasted white with his signature sun block, was true to his word.

Powell Blankenship's trademark was loyalty.

When Blankenship passed away in August, more evidence emerged of his loyal nature.

The *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported that Blankenship had been offered a tennis scholarship to UCLA in the 1950s, but turned it down, loyally choosing to stay in Pacific Beach to care for his widowed mother, an invalid.

In 1960, studying at San Diego State for a teaching credential, Blankenship loyally joined the Aztec men's tennis team at the invitation of Coach Al Olsen. A talented lefthander, Blankenship helped the Aztecs win the Califor-

*Continued on Page 2*

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**  
**Dear D-i-g-i-t-a-l ATR 2**  
**Aztec Ambassador 3**  
**Waske Stalls, Surges 4**



ATR Staff Photo

**COMPLEX:** Viewed from dormitory window, Aztec Tennis Center awaits dedication.

The Aztec Tennis Center, a three-acre complex which grew out of a chance meeting between an Aztec coach and a millionaire donor and consumed more than a decade of planning and preparation, is ready for official inauguration.



**Nelson**

Eleven years of design, study and construction will end in February when the university formally celebrates the opening of the center. While both men's and women's teams al-

### CALLING ALL TEAMS

San Diego State will formally open the new Aztec Tennis Center with a reception, ceremony, and team matches on Feb 3-5. For invitations, Carol Gay of the Aztec Athletic Foundation asked all past players and coaches to contact her at 619-594-7924 or cgay@mail.sdsu.edu.

ready have played matches on the courts, SDSU plans to officially dedicate the facility and an adjoining softball diamond together.

Both are gifts of Becky and John Moores, philanthropists who live in San Diego. He owns the San

Diego Padres, chairs The Carter Center and is a University of California regent.

Moores originally pledged \$2 million to build a tennis center in 1994, according to John Nelson, then Aztec men's coach, who said the two men met at a round-robin tennis exhibition at the Rancho Santa Fe Country Club.



**Moores**

"He was my fourth doubles partner of the afternoon," recalled Nelson, who left a decade later to coach at the University of Hawaii.

Moores' interest in baseball had already led him to pledge funds for Tony Gwynn Stadium at SDSU. To make way for it, the university was forced to demolish the men's practice tennis courts.

John Moores accepted responsibility for the dislocation, Nelson said. "Because we tore out your courts," he quoted Moores as saying, "I'd commit the money for a tennis complex."

Beyond the pledge there was an immediate benefit: Moores began donating \$15,000 a year to Aztec men's tennis, Nelson said, boosting scholarships and enabling Nelson to recruit Alex Waske, a

*Continued on Page 4*

## Aztec Haynes Dies in an Accident

Aztec Dontia Haynes, a member of the 2004 and 2005 Aztec men's teams, died in a motorcycle accident in San Diego in September. His sister, Angela Haynes, plays on the professional women's tour.

"We are feeling a big void around here," said his coach Gene Carswell.

"Dontia has been around the team a lot this semester, helping some of



ATR Photo

**Haynes**

the younger guys with their games. He's even been out for our 6:30 morning running. He's been very motivated to stay connected with the team. It's a tough loss we won't soon be over."

The Aztec Athletic Foundation said donations for a Haynes memorial scholarship would be accepted in his name and placed in an investment fund to endow Aztec athletics.

Continued from Page 1  
 nia Collegiate Athletic Association title in the final match of the season against Los Angeles State.

But there was a problem.

The losing coach challenged Blankenship's eligibility, citing his work as a Recreation Department tennis instructor. (He had, after all, supported himself and his mother with his modest fees).

After a review of records, the conference title was withdrawn.

Rowell was such a gentleman, said Bill Jack, the

## An Aztec for Whom Loyalty Was Key

team's top player. No doubt that he realized his participation would jeopardize the outcome of the match.

Blankenship shrugged off the incident and began teaching math at Pacific Beach Junior High School. For years, he gave his students tennis



**Powell Blankenship**

lessons for free.

Fred Kinne, a newspaperman and tennis patron, said that at his request, Blankenship once took a needy Mexican boy into his home so the deserving player could attend school and play tennis.

In 1962, Blankenship became the Pacific Beach Tennis

Club's first teaching pro. (In 1998, he was honored as San Diego's outstanding tennis teacher).

He taught 43 years at the club and was still on the court two weeks before he passed away. A final act of loyalty: Until three days before his death, he rose regularly to feed and walk his dogs, Fred and Farina.

As the teenage player who scrounged stray balls to pay for his lessons, I will never forget Powell Blankenship, a generous teacher true to his word and loyal to his beloved sport of tennis. — John Martin (1957)

## Dear ATR: Sizing Up the Digital Edition and Requesting Delivery by E-Mail

**Dear ATR:** Thanks for all you have done for Aztec Tennis! It's great to receive the newsletter and keeping up with the old and new news regarding the Aztecs. Your work and dedication to San Diego State tennis and to the athletic department is inspiring to all of us. Best of luck to Coaches Peter (Mattera) and Gene (Carswell) and their teams this year. From an old Aztec with fond memories,

**Dr. Ann Lebedeff**  
 Associate Professor  
 Head Coach, Women's Tennis  
 Pomona-Pitzer Colleges  
 Pomona, CA

*The writer shared the 1974 National Intercollegiate Women's Doubles title with Karen Reinke Bishop; their AIAW victory was the first of two national doubles titles won by Aztec tennis players. The National Intercollegiate Men's Indoor title was won by Aztecs Oliver Maiberger and Ryan Redondo in 2001.*

**Dear ATR:** Please sign me up. Thanks.

**Gene Lachelt**  
 Las Vegas  
*The writer, who played Aztec*

*men's tennis in 1975-79, is a commercial fisherman in Alaska in the summer and an electrician in Las Vegas in the winter.*

**Dear ATR:** I would like to continue receiving ATR.

**Larry Strickland**  
 Washington, DC  
*The writer is the men's tennis coach at Howard University.*

**Dear ATR:** Sure, keep it coming! I would like to get the digital edition of *Aztec Tennis Reporter*.

**James Fallows**  
 Washington, DC  
*The writer is the National Correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly and an avid tennis player and fan from the University of Redlands.*

**Dear ATR:** Please continue to send me the *Aztec Tennis Reporter* and thanks for all the work you do.

**Carol Plunkett**  
 Portland, OR  
*The writer coached Aztec women to 14 All-American honors between 1976 and 1993*

*and was inducted into the San Diego State University Athletic Hall of Fame in 2000.*

**Dear ATR:** Thanks for Aztec Tennis Reporter. You can add me to the list for e-mail.

**Kevin Keenan**  
 Manhattan Beach, CA  
*The writer played Aztec men's tennis in 1979-1980.*

**Dear ATR:** I got the latest edition via e-mail. It was excellent. It looks fantastic in color! I would love to continue to receive it via e-mail, and appreciate all the work you have put into it over the years. ATR is a fabulous vehicle to let those of us who are removed from San Diego to stay in touch. I have not been back since I graduated in 1998, but hear the campus has come a long way on the tennis facility. I am glad to see my old doubles partner, Alexander Waske, is doing well on the professional tour.

**Frank Morgan**  
 The Woodlands, TX  
*The writer, who played Aztec men's tennis in 1993-94*

*and 1996-98, works in the natural gas supply and interconnection industry.*

**Dear ATR:** I really enjoy receiving the Aztec Tennis Reporter. Thank you for taking the time to provide it.

**Tenley Treat Gritts**  
 San Diego  
*The writer played Aztec women's tennis in 1981-85.*

**Dear Readers:** Thanks very much for your emails (far too many to print). ATR is in its seventh year as a free newsletter for Aztec tennis alumni and friends of SDSU tennis. To save me heavy printing and shipping costs (nearly \$1,000 per issue), may I send your copy by e-mail? It will be in color in the same format. If you need help, I'll mail you easy instructions for opening the attachment and printing your copy. Please join ATR in the digital world by requesting an e-mail copy from [aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com](mailto:aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com).

The Editor

## Aztec Tennis Reporter

Editor: John Martin Copy: Martin Schram Circulation: Sherry Bertram, Sumner Bouldin, Madaline Cerrato, Ruud Dorenbos, Jimmy Earle, Desmond Fitzgerald, Katherine Fitzhugh, Shannon Lambrechts, Claire Martin, Peter Mattera, Jeannette Rolfe, Ruth Spenser, Alexandra Van Selm, Linda Walters, Floyd Walters, Weston Williams, Mike Wussow. Photographers: Claire Martin, Art Seitz. This is the 30th edition of *Aztec Tennis Reporter*, established in 1999 for players, coaches, alumni, and friends of SDSU tennis. This issue goes to about 1,800 readers in the United States and 25 foreign countries. To subscribe, comment, or seek a correction, write to [aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com](mailto:aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com).

**Peter Mattera (Women's Coach) 619-594-6505**

**Gene Carswell (Men's Coach) 619-594-5084**

# Where Are We Now? Coach Larry Willens, Aztec Ambassador



Aztec Tennis Reporter photos

**DAY WATCHMAN:** Aztec Larry Willens, second from right, monitors play of Abigail Spears at 2005 Australian Open. Willens has spent much of the last 25 years coaching on the men's and women's pro tours and at SDSU. He helped Spears at Melbourne (she reached third round), at French Open in Paris, and at Wimbledon.

## Globetrotting Tennis Scholar Bears SDSU's Banner

Larry Willens nurtures a dual identity: He helps train San Diego State's men and women as their volunteer tennis coach but disappears in January, May, June, July, and September. There's no mystery: He travels as a coach and logistician to touring professionals, most recently former UCLA Bruin Abigail Spears of San

Diego and Aztec Alex Waske of Germany.

In the 1980s, Willens coached Butch Waltz, one of the first big servers on the men's tour; Gretchen Magers, once a top junior and later an Aztec volunteer women's coach; and Robin White, who won the 1989 U.S. Open doubles title with Gigi Fernandez.

Willens had been a top junior athlete but it was his aca-

demic prowess that led him into coaching. Graduating from San Jose State in 1962, he did a stint in the Navy; in 1968, he earned a master's degree in motor learning and physical education at San Diego State. Soon, he was coaching baseball at USC and later, at SDSU.

A friend of Billie Jean King since their junior tennis days, Willens later led the

San Diego Friars and Sacramento Capitals in World Team Tennis, acting as coach to Rod Laver, Cliff Drysdale, and Kerry Melville Reid.

Today, circling the globe in Aztec shirts, hats, and tennis gear, Larry Willens stands out: He is the friendly, familiar face of San Diego State in the world of international tennis.



**NAME DROPPER:** In Aztec shirts and caps, Willens, above with Spears at Wimbledon, takes San Diego State's name to top tennis events in Australia, France, England, and United States.

# Aztec Tennis Center: An 11-Year Odyssey Nears a Final Chapter

Continued from Page 1

German student-athlete whose success has raised the Aztec tennis profile worldwide.

Yet the tennis center took an astonishingly long time to materialize. That's because San Diego State planners had higher priorities: Finding space for a series of gifts from the Moores eventually totaling \$30 million, including an office building for the entire athletic department.

The Moores made a formal pledge of \$2 million for a tennis center in 1998. A year later, Vance Redfern, a department official, told *ATR* that construction was three to four years away. The tennis complex was to contain 12 to 16 courts, including a stadium with 3,500 permanent and portable seats. The total estimated cost was \$3 million. (Tennis Complex Due in 3-4 Years, *ATR*, Vol 1, No 1)

But it wasn't until two years ago that the university demolished an aging, three-dorm complex and shifted residents across campus to clear space for the tennis center. At one point, the school said it would need \$1 million of the gift for demoli-

## Hedberg Returns To Assist Women

Lindsey Hedberg (2000-2003), whose 78 college career victories rank second among Aztec women, has joined head coach Peter Mattera as assistant women's coach. She replaces Christy Propstra Panter, who gave birth to a son, Carson Panter, on June 25.



Aztec Tennis Reporter Photo

### CLUBHOUSE: Aztec coaches plan a February dedication of new SDSU tennis facility, started with a \$2 million gift.

tion expenses, but Moores protested, and Sally Roush, SDSU vice president of business and finance, found the funds elsewhere.

Then, as construction grew near, Aztec coaches were shocked to discover there was no longer enough money to build a stadium.

They had hoped that a facility seating up to 3,500 fans would attract sponsors of a major professional ten-

nis event and provide new revenue for Aztec tennis, especially for the men's team, which has gained increased funding but still receives less than any of the NCAA's top 25 teams.

SDSU President Steve Weber said rising building costs doomed the stadium. With too little money, the idea faded. A year ago last spring, workers poured slabs for 12 tennis courts, adding three rows of concrete benches along the

east side of the complex.

"I was very disappointed," Moores said. "What I really wanted was a center court."

Even so, Moores praised Weber for committing funds for an aquatic center and pursuing an Aztec athletics master plan.

Mike Woomer, an SDSU facilities planner, said the university set aside and invested \$5.5 million of the Moores' gifts for the tennis and softball complex. The money earned about \$900,000 in interest, he said.

Adding funds of its own, the university spent \$6.6 million for construction and \$1.2 million for architecture and engineering fees, code reviews, soils testing, construction management, inspection and testing, telecommunications and data services, fees, and permits, Woomer said. Vice President Roush said a very rough analysis put the cost of the tennis center alone at about \$5 million.

Coach Peter Mattera said a stadium effect could still be created by erecting two raised stands for about \$1 million. He said the university would name the tennis center for a corporate or private donor of the money.

"I don't want my name on anything," Moores said, revealing that he has discussed helping purchase video training equipment for the tennis center.

Meanwhile, one Aztec has donated his personal funds on a smaller but significant scale.

Larry Willens confirmed that he has given more than \$20,000 to furnish the clubhouse and its satellite coaches' office with a big-screen television set, microwave, refrigerator, desks, chairs, and lounge furniture.

A volunteer Aztec coach, Willens added \$6,000 for a pair of equipment sheds.

## Aztec Stalls, Revives in Davis Cup

Aztec Alex Waske's drive up the international tennis ladder came to a halt at the U.S. Open in late August, but resumed in Germany's Davis Cup victory over the Czech Republic.

In New York, Waske and Tommy Haas of Germany lost in the first round to Americans Scott Oudesma and Alex Kuznetsov, 7-6 (6), 6-3.

In the Davis Cup, Waske hit the winning shot on match point in Germany's doubles victory



ATR Photo

### LOSS: Waske at U.S. Open.

over the Czech pair of Frantisek Cermak and Leos Friedl, 4-6, 7-5, 6-2, 2-6, 6-4. The next day, Haas won the deciding singles point that allowed Germany to retain its World Group status.

In the Vietnam Open, Waske upset Lars Burgsmuller of Germany, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (3) to reach the quarterfinals, where he lost to Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman, 6-2, 6-3.

In October, Waske was ranked by the ATP at 31st in

**Aztec  
Tennis  
Reporter**

Founder-Editor: John Martin

Tennis Coaches  
San Diego State University  
San Diego, CA 92182

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
San Diego, CA  
Permit No. 265