

# Aztec Tennis Reporter

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## Undaunted by Losses, Aztecs Seeking Mountain West Titles

### *Hello Duke City: Aztecs in Town (And So Is Dad)*

By SOPHIE MARTIN  
ALBUQUERQUE — So I pretend to myself that my dad is in town this weekend to visit me, but the sad truth is that he's here to watch the Lobo men's tennis team play his San Diego State Aztecs.

If I want to hang out with Dad (who, in addition to being a tennis fanatic and SDSU alum, is editor of *Aztec Tennis Reporter*), I clearly need to hang out at the UNM tennis center.

Dad was on the 1957 Aztec team (when I asked him just a moment ago, he pointed out that he was "the number two guy on the team". Uh huh).

Interestingly, Gene Carswell, the Aztec men's coach, was a Lobo player from '89-'93. When I asked about him in the clubhouse, consensus was that he was a really good player for UNM.

As I'm writing, the doubles matches have just concluded (the Aztecs taking two of the three matches). The six singles matches are up and the small but dedicated crowd is pulling hard for the Lobo players.

I'd like to think UNM is going to win. Dad's allegiance is clear. I'll report back later on who pays for lobster dinner tonight.

*The writer, a businesswoman, posted this blog for Duke City Fix, Albuquerque's most popular website. The Aztecs lost; her father bought dinner.*



*Aztec Tennis Reporter Photos*

**SLUGGER:** Aztec Milana Yusupov meets ball against Wake Forest's Christian Tara, who won, 6-4, 6-4. Deacons prevailed, 5-2. Aztecs beat Harvard, 6-1, then lost five matches before closing regular conference play with four consecutive 7-0 victories.



**SLUGGER:** Aztec Achim Ceban keeps eye on ball against Air Force's Johnny Buckingham. Ceban won, 6-1, 6-0; Aztecs beat the Academy's best, 7-0, but dropped their next five matches.

**REACH:** Andre Feliz, left, Holly Bagshaw, below right, and Aztec Coach Peter Mattera on courts.



### Women Surge to 4 Final Wins By 7-0 Margin

Staggered by twin five-match losing streaks, San Diego State's men's and women's tennis teams rode a Mountain West Conference roller coaster across the final half of the regular season.

The Aztec men and women open tournament play in Fort Worth on Thursday, April 24, both at 10 a.m. at the Bayard Friedman Tennis Center. The women face third-seeded New Mexico, the men face top seed Utah, the conference champion.

The Aztec women started the 2008 season with a three-match victory streak, then won only four of their next sixteen matches, including a five-match drought, losing to Utah (4-3), BYU (4-1), New Mexico (4-3), TCU (5-2), and UNLV (5-2).

Then they closed the regular season with four 7-0 victories, against conference foes Air Force, Wyoming, and Colorado State, and their crosstown rival University of San Diego.

"We've gotten some momentum in winning our last four matches, said Coach Peter Mattera. "We're feeling pretty confident. We've been through a rough rotation. There's nobody really

*Continued on Page 4*

**INSIDE**  
College Tennis at 60? 2  
Dear ATR: Tom Brown 2  
Where Are We Now? 3  
Aztec Photo Portfolio 4

Sheila Johnson is doing what any self-respecting housewife would do if given the chance. She's playing college tennis — at the age of 60.

Decades back, Johnson played for Arizona State for three years, she told *The Arizona Republic* when the newspaper found out she was playing out her eligibility at Grand Canyon University, a Division II school.

The newspaper, in a story picked up recently by *USA Today*, said Johnson is the oldest active college player in the country. At the time of the report, Johnson was 11-6 in singles and 7-10 in doubles.

The newspaper said this is a trend in sports, people of middle age or older jumping into competition with younger athletes.

Johnson jumped in when her regular tennis teacher took a job coaching at Grand Canyon and she faced the prospect of fewer lessons. Rather than shift her

## College Tennis Later in Life? OK!



Photo: Arizona Republic

**PRACTICE PERFECTION: Sheila Johnson of Grand Canyon University tosses serve in a warm-up drill. At 60, she may be the oldest collegiate player in the country.**

weekly training to another pro, Johnson, a Phoenix mother and high school math teacher, apparently began feeling her competitive juices returning after 40 years (she played for the Sun Devil women's tennis team in 1963-65)).

"Fine," she said she told friends (and later the newspaper), "I'll just get a scholarship there (Grand Canyon U) and

get my lessons for free."

Lest any reader (and former college player) think this could happen anywhere, consider the special circumstances.

Grand Canyon hired Johnson's coach, Greg Prudhomme, 37, barely a month before the season started to resurrect a program that had languished. According to *USA Today*, there were no

returning players. The implication is that the school's investment in tennis had teetered on the brink of extinction.

Prudhomme hit the tour in the 1990s. ATP records show he reached a career-high singles ranking of 1209 in late 1994 and a career-high doubles ranking of 1130 in 1995.

While his total career earnings of \$1,410 do not place him high in all-time records, he rode down a path a lot of college players would love to join.

Now Johnson is playing out a fantasy lots of former college players may have dreamed: Hit with the twenty-somethings and show them a thing or two.

"It's been great," she told Paola Boivin, the Arizona Republic reporter, "I feel young, in class and on the court. I haven't shaved 40 years off my life, but I've shaved a few."

And gained years of respect from her tennis-playing contemporaries. — John Martin

## Dear ATR: Thanks for Aztec Coverage, Reviewing Tom Brown Book

Dear ATR:

The current (January) issue is super!!! I especially like the "Where Are We Now" piece. Keep up the great work!

Ralph Anderson  
San Diego

Dear ATR:

Nice review on my Uncle Tom Brown's book ("As Tom Goes By," ATR, January, 2008). Thanks for the courtesy.

Joe Brown  
Maine

*The writer is an author and retired reporter who worked for a number of newspapers, including The San Diego Union.*

Dear ATR:

I'm glad you ran a piece on Tom Brown (ATR, January, 2008). I'll have to get his book. I saw him play a couple of times in the 70's out here--Bay Area tournaments--and he showed a beautiful game: wonderful flat ground strokes and much grace of movement. He was far past his prime but still could beat younger locally prominent players, often without much trouble.

A.G. Clarkson  
Santa Cruz

*The writer played men's tennis at the University of Santa Clara in the 1950s.*

Dear ATR:

Gardner Mulloy? ("Tom Brown's Days," ATR, January, 2008) There's a name I hadn't heard in 20 years. I had no idea he was still playing tennis -- or even alive, for that matter. Real nice story on Tom Brown. By the way, Lee Swennes of the 1960 Aztec team was a classmate of mine at Helix High.

Roger Conlee  
San Diego

*The writer, a former sportswriter and editor, is a novelist.*

Dear ATR:

Enjoyed the issue (January, 2008). Thank you for doing this!

Tenley (Treat) Gritts  
San Diego

*The writer, a dentist, played Aztec women's tennis in 1981-1985.*

Dear ATR:

I read it cover-to-cover, enjoying it all

even though I'm not an alum.

Chuck Wattles  
Washington, DC

*The writer, a native of El Centro, is a former Peace Corps training official who works in international development.*

Dear ATR:

Thanks so much for all the work you put into the *Aztec Tennis Reporter*. I really enjoy reading the current news on Aztec tennis as well as the latest news on our alumni. It is one way of establishing a wonderful tradition for SDSU tennis. Much appreciation.

Karen Bishop  
San Diego

*As Karen Reinke, the writer won the national intercollegiate women's doubles title (NAIA) for San Diego State in 1974 with Ann Lebedeff; it was the first national title won by Aztec tennis players.*

Dear ATR:

Another great edition (January, 2008). Thank you.

Stephen Weber  
San Diego

*The writer, a long-time supporter of Aztec tennis, is president of San Diego State University.*

**Aztec Tennis Reporter, April 2008**  
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Editor: John Martin (Aztec Men's Tennis, 1957)

# 2003 Aztec Women's Tennis Team

**PATRICIA GRAF:** I lived in Florida for two years, working and playing at the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy. I'm currently doing my Masters in Neuro Cognitive Psychology at the University of Munich. I'm playing club matches in the German League this season and I will be doing an internship at Harvard this summer.

**SILVIA TORNIER:** I can't believe it's been 5 years!!! In 2004, I went back to Hamburg and worked two years for a consulting company. At the end of last year, I began managing web marketing for a French company (JM Bruneau) in Hamburg. I still enjoy playing tennis but cannot do it as often. I have very good memories of SDSU and miss San Diego's perfect climate. I am still waiting for Peter and my teammates to come visit me in Germany!

**INDRA ERICHSEN:** I'm living in New York and studying at Columbia University's graduate School of International and Public Affairs. (I worked two years for a big international German copper company). I don't get to play as much tennis as I would like but I still go to my club in Hamburg when I'm home. This summer I'll be working in Germany in consulting and hope to play more.

**KATALINA ROMERO:** My teammates say I've had a baby — maybe two! — and that I'm living back in Mexico. (I come from Tijuana). Can you help Aztec Tennis Reporter find me?

**SARAH SANSOM:** One of my teammates said I just got engaged and that I'm still living in San Diego but nobody seems to know where. Can you help the Aztec Tennis Reporter find me?

**JULIE LITRICH:** I'm working for a commercial real estate company, Sperry Van Ness, and living in Del Mar with my boyfriend, Dan, and golden retriever, Bud. I'm getting back into tennis and recently played a few father-daughter tournaments with my amazingly talented Dad. I enjoy surfing, running, hiking, and traveling. I miss all the sun, fun — and exercise! — that we all took advantage of during college. Occasionally I baby sit for both Geno and Lainie Carswell (the Aztec men's coach), and Doug and Christy Panter (she was our assistant coach).



**LINDSAY (HEDBERG) GAMP:** I'm back at San Diego State helping Peter Mattered coach my old team (the 2008 edition, that is). I taught tennis as a professional at clubs in the San Diego area before accepting Peter's offer to be his assistant. I have been happily married for almost two years to Steve Gamp, who played lacrosse at SDSU and is working at Wellsfargo Financial. No kids for awhile because we have a lot of other things we want to do first. My sister is now living in Santa Barbara so I get to see her a lot (yes, she played her college tennis at Texas A&M).

**COLBY COMSTOCK:** I'm living in Redondo Beach with my roommate from college (we both grew up in this area), and I'm working in the mortgage business (my mom owns her own company, which I will eventually take over — if all goes as planned!). I'm definitely not using my college degree, not married yet, and probably won't be for awhile! I play tennis for fun, but not like I used to! Tennis is a great sport, though, because you can play it forever!

**KATJA (KARRENTO) KOVACIC:** I'm living in Providence, Rhode Island, with my husband Karlo Kovacic (he was on the Aztec basketball team when I was there) and our 5-month-old daughter Maya. I am just finishing medical school at Brown University (I was in the Dartmouth-Brown medical program where you spend the first two years at Dartmouth and second two at Brown). I will graduate next month and start my residency in pediatrics this summer, also here at Brown.



Aztec Maya Kovacic

Photos: SDSU Athletic Department (team); Kovacic Family

# Aztecs Seek to Forget Losses, Aim for Mountain West Titles

*Continued from Page One*  
 head and shoulders above us," he said

The Aztec men split their first ten matches, then won seven of their next eight contests before dropping five consecutive encounters, against Utah (5-2), New Mexico (5-2), BYU (4-3), TCU (4-1), and UNLV (4-2).

The carnage left both Aztec teams as underdogs in the conference-ending tournaments, which crown Mountain West champions and send victors to NCAA post-season championships.

With four consecutive 7-0 victories, the women's spirits picked up as the squad prepared to go to Fort Worth for the season-ending tournament.

Still, the conference championship posed a special challenge, Mattera said.

"Anybody who can come out with confidence, belief, and heart and soul for three matches in a row can win it."

The test, Mattera said, comes down to a simple equation: "You gotta do it (win) three days in a row, and hopefully that's the Aztecs."

The men's encounter with Utah offers a chance for the Aztecs to avenge a 5-2 loss to the Utes in early April in Albuquerque.

There, the Aztecs lost the doubles point but appeared ready to sweep Utah off the courts, taking five of six first sets in the singles.

Aztecs Matan Shitrit and Tim Schulz Van Endert polished off their opponents. Shitrit defeated Othman Zerouali-Ouariti,



*Aztec Tennis Reporter*

**PATIENCE AND CONFIDENCE:** Aztec Kathryn Kitts, left, consoles a dejected Sisse Nielsen in the midst of doubles match against Wake Forest. Deacons won, 5-2, but slumping Aztecs regrouped, won their four final matches, overwhelming each team by a score of 7-0.

6-2, 6-1, and Schulz Van Endert defeated John Taylor, 6-2, 6-3.

Then the roof began to slowly collapse on the Aztecs' hopes. Except for Bartosz



**TOSS OF HOPE:** Aztec Julia Trunk serves against Wake Forest. SDSU lost to the Deacons but scored victories over Penn, 4-3, and Harvard, 6-1.

Golas, who fell in straight sets, 7-6 (6), 6-2, to Zack Ganger, the surviving Aztecs all found themselves forced into third sets.

Aztec Andre Feliz fought off a late charge by Timmy Allin before falling, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4. Aztec Achim Ceban battled Wes Hancock toe-to-toe before losing 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-4. In the match that clinched the victory for Utah, Aztec Juan Gomez shook off a surprise line call by a referee which cost him a key point in the second set and battled into a third set. Ute Miron Mann was the victor, 4-6, 7-6 (2), 6-1.

The loss helped Utah win the conference season title and led to the slide that shoved the Aztecs into sixth position in the Mountain West, above hapless Air Force.

"It's definitely a little different," said Coach Gene Carswell.

"There's no point in sugarcoating this. We've got to beat the conference champion (Utah) to advance. It will not be easy"

But, he said, "I figure our chances are good. We'll be back at full strength (Danny Heidecker missed matches due to illness), and we'll be back at an elevation that will do us quite well." The losses came in Utah and New Mexico, where the altitude affects performance.

In the last three years, the Aztec men went undefeated in regular conference play. This year is different.

"We have something to prove," Carswell said, "and we'll have to take whatever we get. I can say we're ready."

By the third week of April, the men ranked 60th in the country in Division 1; the women, despite their closing surge, had dropped out of the top 75.



**ALL AMERICAN ADVICE:** Aztec Barty Golas, far left, listens as Ryan Redondo, assistant coach and two-time All American, offers counsel during Golas's defeat in match against New Mexico. Aztec Juan Gomez, center, slams backhand in effort against Utah's Miron Mann. Aztec Esther Cadua, right, eyes the ball in her singles victory against Wake Forest.