

# Aztec Tennis Reporter

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SERVING THE SAN DIEGO STATE TENNIS COMMUNITY SINCE 1999

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## Handbook Wisdom For High School Tennis Coaching

In 1991, Roy Gessford wanted a one-handed backhand. His UC San Diego teammates



Gessford

pointed him to Powell Blankenship, the 1960 Aztec player teaching at the Pacific Beach Tennis Club.

"It was metaphysical,"

Gessford said, praising Blankenship's wise, philosophical approach to tennis and life.

Gessford gained a stroke that served him well in college tennis, the international circuit, as a teaching pro at clubs in Carmel and Monterey and at overseas resorts for Peter Burwash.

Along the way, Gessford began coaching high school teams, fall and spring, calling this "the most satisfying."

Recently, he published a handbook, a 41-page compendium of sage observation ("You're Only as Good as Your Lowest Doubles Team") and savvy guidance ("No Groundstrokes the First Week.")

Each chapter pins down essential elements, much like those created by UCLA bas-

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1940 Aztec Tennis Mates Wrote SDSU Ray During War Pg 3



Aztec Tennis Reporter photos

**PLAYER OF THE YEAR:** San Diego State's Laura Antonana Iriarte, ranked as high as 35th, defeats Harvard's Spencer Liang 6-1, 6-1. She was selected Mountain West Player of the Year. Aztecs stunned 37th ranked Crimson, 6-1.

## Top Aztec Woman Mountain West Player of Year

Aztec Laura Antonana Iriarte won five player of the week awards and was declared the Mountain West player of the year at the conference championships in Fresno.

Ranked 42nd in the nation, the top Aztec women's player received an invitation to compete in the NCAA singles championship in Athens, GA, in late May. She is the first SDSU singles player to make the trip in 17 years.

In the Mountain West men's championship final, top-seeded Boise State defeated New Mexico, 4-0. In the women's title match, top-seeded Fresno State defeated New Mexico, 4-2.

San Diego State's two tennis teams scrambled

## MEN AND WOMEN GAIN SEMIFINALS TO END A SEASON

into the year-end tournament in Fresno with hopes of claiming the conference title.

The Aztec men defeated UNLV, 4-1, but fell in a semifinal cliffhanger, 4-3,

to New Mexico. On the same day, the Aztec women defeated San Jose State, 4-2, then dropped their semifinal test to New Mexico, 4-2.

Aztec women's coach Peter Mattera called the two matches "heart-breakers." Both Aztec

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**SLICE:** Aztec Hunter Nicholas, all-Mountain West in singles, in a match against Jason Tahir of Duke.

# An Aztec's Tennis Shop Gets New Look as It Sails into Its 45th Year



Aztec Tennis Reporter Photos

**VISION:** Hiroko Ray, left, and Roger Ray, right, have given their family tennis shop a facelift in its 45th year.

In 1980, Aztec Bob Ray and his wife, Hiroko, moved their tennis shop to Hillcrest after 11 years at Morley Field, site of the Balboa Tennis Club. As they grew, their children, Roger and Sophie, worked alongside them.

This year, with Roger, an artist with a businessman's eye and an architect's vision, the Rays have transformed their warehouse-style labyrinth of racks and shelves into a modern showroom.

After 34 years on University Avenue, Ray's Tennis has gotten a facelift. At night, a neon sign now glows. New windows bring in more daylight. The sales register still lives to the right of the front door. Nearly 1,000 racquets still hang on dozens of spikes on the imposing east wall.

The three Rays (Sophie now lives in Holland) have expanded their clientele, which was once

drawn largely from East San Diego and Tijuana.

"Now we have people from Rancho Santa Fe," said Hiroko with a shy smile.

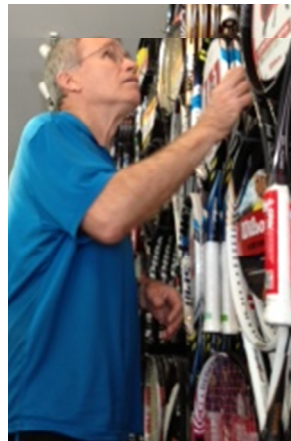
Aztec Ray is a longtime teaching pro who played on the undefeated 1961 Aztec men's team and was conference doubles champion with Gary Bunker in 1961 and 1962.

"This remodel," Ray said in an email, "makes the statement that we are committed to continuing the business into the next generation."

A U.S. Navy officer who served in Vietnam (he met Hiroko in Japan), Ray seems at ease as he walks around the command deck (amid strings, shoes and shorts). In its 45th year, his ship is firmly on course as a venerable tennis institution.



Aztec Ray (1962)



Aztec Ray (2014)

## A Handbook Offers Coaching Wisdom for High School Tennis — and Beyond

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ketball wizard John Wooden.

"I structured each practice down to the minute and kept the plans on a notecard or clipboard. Those lesson plans kept the practices organized, forced me to continually innovate and gave the players a reliable formula for each practice."

Gessford offers defining observations:

"Often the biggest growth in a player's career came not when they learned to hit a winning shot but when they learned to work through adversity with a positive attitude."

"Some coaches measure success by wins and losses. I think a better gauge is how much players on a team improve over the course of a season."

**A High School Tennis Coach's Handbook, Roy Gessford, \$20, LetntheLight@gmail.com, 619-717-3460**

Make no mistake. Gessford likes to win. His chapters on strength ("Conditioning, Conditioning, Conditioning") and preparation ("Game Day!") reveal goals and strategies for winning.

Blankenship taught him a powerful backhand volley. "It's physics, Roy!," Blankenship told him, he said. "Opposite motions balance."

Gessford understood. "I began to see when the racquet hand moves forward while the off-hand moves backward with the same force, the stroke no longer became about human strength but about the forces balancing each other."

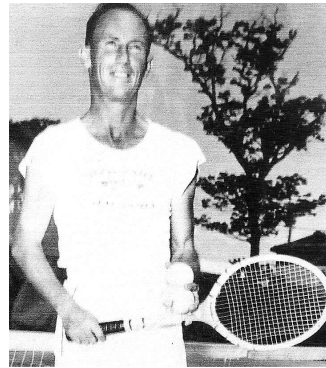
In *A High School Tennis Coach's Handbook*, Gessford strikes a balance between practical advice and philosophical wisdom — enough to last teacher and student a lifetime. — **J.M.**

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Aztec Tennis Reporter is a newsletter created in 1999 for players, coaches, alumni, and friends of San Diego State tennis. Neither the university nor its athletic department is responsible for its content. This is the 57th issue. To comment, correct, or subscribe, email [aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com](mailto:aztectennisreporter@yahoo.com). Editor: John Martin (1957)

# Where Are We Now? Aztecs in War (1940)

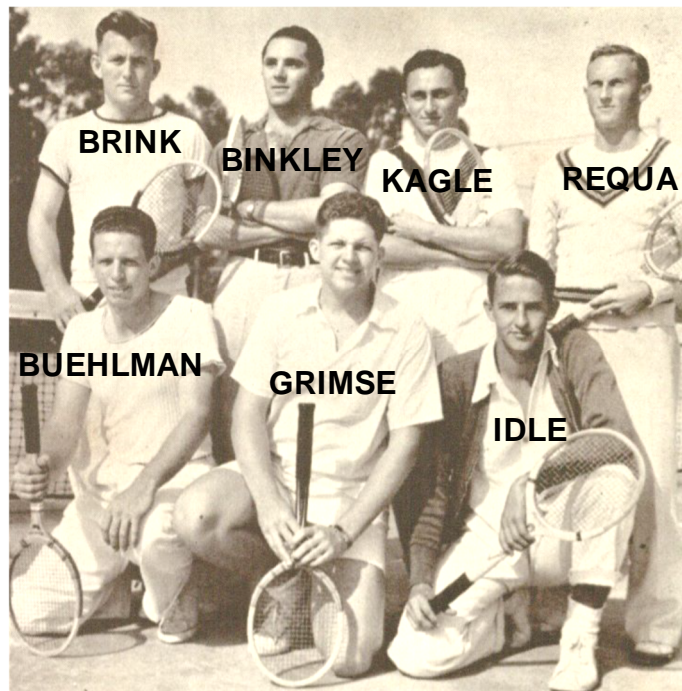
**JOHN BINKLEY** flew attack planes in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Writing from North Africa on February 18, 1943, he warned that the war would be long: "Hitler has a great deal of fight left in him." He urged his parents not to worry, saying he had matured and found a "greater peace of mind" while flying. "I am...exposed to death fairly constantly," Binkley wrote, "yet I can truthfully say that there is really no fear present...if my number should come up, I am ready." His plane was shot down and he was killed in action April 2, 1943. Four months later, friend and classmate Blair Burkhardt, wrote that a pilot flying on Binkley's final mission described him as "one of the best liked boys in his outfit and its best pilot."



Ed Requa (1952)

**ED REQUA** served in the Navy during World War II, earned a business degree and studied Japanese at UC Berkeley, then worked as a civilian for the U.S. Army in Okinawa and Japan (1951-1960) and Arizona (1960-73). His widow, Tsuneko, lives in Rancho Bernardo. They married in 1956 in Tokyo. Despite a 20-year difference in age, "We were soulmates," she said. Requa kept his team photo at hand and played tennis into the 1950s. He played golf into his late 80s and worked at the Torrey Pines, Balboa and Stoneridge Golf Clubs. Requa died in 2008, three months shy of his 96th birthday.

## 1940 Aztec Men's Tennis Team



Wartime letters written by 1940 Aztec tennis teammates were published by Dr. Lauren Post, a geology professor. His newsletter circulated 3,000 messages sent him by Aztecs across the world. The SDSU Library's Special Collections branch has organized the letters for researchers.

**RAFAEL HUERTA**, the 1940 Aztec team captain, served in the U.S. Army Air Corps 337th Fighter Group in North Africa in World War II, worked at Ryan Aeronautical as an inspector of Navy drones in an experimental department, and retired after 25 years in quality control at Charco Construction. "At San Diego State," he told *Aztec Tennis Reporter* in 2001, "I was called Baron because I used to read a lot about Baron von Richthofen (German flying ace). Huerta passed away at age 96 in 2006. His widow, Julia Huerta, 84, lives in Lakeside.



Huerta (1938)

**JOHN BRINK, BILL BUEHLMAN, TOM IDLE AND HOWARD KAGLE: ATR can't find us. Can you help?**

**ROY GRIMSE** was the number one player on the 1940 team. He worked as a Hollywood movie cameraman ("For Whom the Bell Tolls") before joining the Army in 1943, according to the March 21, 1945 *Sydney Morning Herald* (he was serving as a lieutenant in Australia). The newspaper said he had won junior tennis titles in Minnesota, South Dakota, and Arizona. According to *American Lawn Tennis* magazine, Grimse lost in a 1943 national tournament to Douglas Woodbury, who defeated Bob Falkenburg in the quarterfinals, then lost to Jack Kramer, who won the Wimbledon title in 1947; Falkenburg won it in 1948. *Tennis Archives* reports that Grimse won two rounds in the 1947 U.S. Clay Court Championships, lost in the 1948 Pacific Southwest Championships (to Ted Schroeder, 1942 U.S. singles champion. 1949 Wimbledon winner), and played in the Houston Open in 1957 and 1958. In 1960, reporting from Mexico City, Roy Grimse's byline appeared on a *Los Angeles Mirror* story of two National Security Agency cryptologists who defected to Russia via Mexico and Cuba. Grimse later owned a public relations firm. He passed away in 1993.



US Army Lt. Roy Grimse

## Aztec Teams Gain Semifinals Of MW Title Test

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teams battled to the final moment.

The season bore haunting similarities to the 2013 finish, where both squads fell in the final tournament round.

The major difference in 2014 were the teams' win-loss records. The men won 12 of 24 matches, the women 12 of 25, leaving both squads hovering at .500.

The season's highlight, Mattera said, was the Aztec women's upset of 37th ranked Harvard, 6-1.

Mattera said a key factor in 2014 was the loss through graduation of half the singles lineup and all three doubles partnerships from the 2013 team (which won 20 matches and an NCAA bid).

"We had some real bright moments and really put together a solid season where, if we could have turned a couple of those 4-3s or 5-2s around," the result would have been better. Six of the team's 13 losses were by scores of 4-3 or 5-2.

Some scores were deceptive, he suggested. "That Fresno State match, we lost 6-1 and four of those singles matches went three sets; very, very close and very competitive and they turned out to be the top dog in our conference."

Men's Coach Gene Carswell said a key moment against New Mexico made it clear to him that his team was capable of championship effort.

"We had team match point at number one singles," he said, "and unfortunately the point didn't come our way." The result, Car-



Aztec Tennis Reporter photos

**EYES ON PRIZE: Aztec Thorsten Bertsch focuses in loss to Duke's Michael Redlicki. Bertsch won all-Mountain West singles honors with Aztec Hunter Nicholas.**

swell said, in which his players "fought for each other," suggested better days ahead: "I think they made some great strides there that are going to push us to the next level for the next year.

Carswell said the Aztecs' competitive, 4-3 loss to Boise State which had ranked in the top 15, was a positive indicator for the team in 2015.

Only two men (Hunter Nicholas and Juan Florez) and one woman (Antonana Iriarte) will be graduating.



**SWEET SPOT: Aztec Kristin Buth in grueling three-set loss to Harvard's Amanda Lin. Buth and Laura Antonana Iriarte were honored for all-Mountain West singles play.**

Even with the loss of Antonana Iriarte, his top player, Mattera said, "I think things look good." One recruit will be freshman Jana Buth, sister of Kristin Buth, who is expected to return for her senior year.

Unranked in January, Antonana Iriarte rode her victories skyward to rank 35th in the nation by early February. She ranked 43rd at season's end.

Her NCAA singles appearance will be the first by an Aztec woman since Maggie Cole in 1997. Silvia Tornier and Indra Erichsen played in NCAA doubles in 2003.

Antonana Iriarte won 53 matches in her two final seasons as an Aztec and scored several upsets.

Against Pepperdine, she defeated 19th ranked Lorraine Guillermo, 6-4, 7-5.

Against USC, Antona Iriarte pushed Sabrina Santamaria, ranked 26th, to two close sets, falling, 7-5, 7-5, the closest match of the day. USC won, 7-0.

Against Cal Berkeley, Antonana Iriarte defeated 26th ranked Anett Schutting, 6-3, 3-6, 6-4.

In her final season, Antonana Iriarte, a journalism major from San Sebastian, Spain, was selected for the all-conference team in singles with teammate Buth of Kaiserslautern, Germany.

Aztecs Hailey Johnson of Fallbrook and Dora Somoracz of Budapest, Hungary, won all-conference honors in doubles.

Aztecs Thorsten Bertsch of Mannheim, Germany, Nicholas of Park City, Utah, and Hendrik Jebens of Stuttgart, Germany, won player of the week honors.

Bertsch and Nicholas were selected for the all-Mountain West singles team.

The Aztec men ranked 69th at season's end; the women, who stood 46th and 58th earlier, finished unranked.