

## Hall of Fame Inductees – Victoria Palmer Heinicke

Victoria took up tennis at the age of four. Her father taught her and her five siblings to play after a friend had asked him to play tennis one day and he saw how fun it was. He bought a book written by Bill Tilden for 50 cents and that was the beginning of their tennis careers. Of the six Palmer siblings, only Victoria and her eldest brother and sister went on to be nationally ranked.

They began playing at the Phoenix Country Club, where the head pro, Pierre Pelizza, was a member of the French Davis Cup team. Top players would come to Phoenix to see him and then Victoria and her siblings would get to play them. By the time she turned 12, she had played with Bill Tilden, Alice Marble, Tony Trabert, Pancho Segura, Jack Kramer, Mary Hardwick Hare, and Doris Hart.

She played her first tournament a few days after her sixth birthday. She won in 3 sets. At the time they played in Phoenix, there were no kids that were competitive with them, so they started to play in California tournaments. After a couple years of winning the Southern California Junior Championships in their age divisions, they were told not to come back and the tournaments became closed to residents of California.

By 12, she had ventured into playing adult tournaments. She took a set off of Louise Brough, ranked second in the country behind Althea Gibson. At 13, she took a set off of Beverly Baker Fleitz, an ambidextrous player who had 2 forehands and was ranked second in the country that year behind Althea Gibson.

At 13, she started playing the women's circuit. There were a group of juniors who broke into the circuit that year including Billie Jean King, Karen Hantze Susman, and Stephanie Defina Hagen. Victoria became the youngest player at the US Championships at Forest Hills at the time, at the age of 14.

At 15, she was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the US. In 1961, she was ranked #1 in juniors and won Junior Nationals, beating Billie Jean in the finals. In 1962, Maureen Connolly Brinker helped prepare her for the grass at Wimbledon, where she lost in the round of 16 to Ann Haydon Jones of Great Britain.

That year, after winning junior nationals again, she played Forest Hills and lost in the semis after beating both Billie Jean and Karen Hantze Susman, the current Wimbledon champ. In 1963, she did not play Wimbledon due to her high school graduation.

She went to the University of Arizona so she did not play Forest Hills that year. During her freshman year she eloped and became pregnant. She played Wimbledon that year and the rumor around the circuit was that she was gaining weight quickly. The marriage and pregnancy was kept a secret – the only people who knew about it were her mother and Teddy Tingling who made new dresses for her. She lost in the second round, and when she returned home, her and her new husband moved to Colorado Springs. It was the end of her playing career.

Overall she won 17 national age group titles before turning 18 and finished with a #7 ranking in the US. She is also credited as being the first grunter.

In Colorado, she played in charity tournaments, which she won every year she played. She taught summer tennis programs for four years at Cheyenne Mountain High School to kids and adults. She became head pro at the Colorado Springs Racquet Club, where she taught adults and top juniors.

Her and her husband Nye have three children and twelve grandchildren.