

Tennis nonprofit an ace for coaches, students



LISA KIMBLE

Earlier this month, nearly 200 student athletes converged on the Bakersfield Racquet Club for the Kern Community Tennis Association's day of drills, lunch and equipment-grab. Nine hundred pieces of gear and clothing were distributed to players anxious to improve their favored sport, but with limited resources to do so.

Nahomy Osorio, 16, plays singles on the Cesar Chavez varsity tennis team. Last fall, the team did the improbable, winning the high school's first-ever Division Valley Championship. It might not have happened, were it not for KCTA.

"Many parents like my family don't have the money to provide equipment and clothing," Osorio said. "There was no way I could possibly join the team without KCTA's help."

Valentina Garcia, a member of the East High School girls' tennis team, has been there.

"I am so grateful for KCTA for sponsoring us and giving us gear," she said. "Without them, I wouldn't have a tennis racket, shoes and visors."

KCTA, although smaller in stature than other organizations, is lobbying a considerable impact on the local student-athletics community.

The numbers are climbing steadily. In 2024, KCTA handed out 269 tennis racquets, 558 pairs of tennis shoes, and 5,000 clothing items.

"The barriers to entry to the sport are too high for many families," said Jerry



PHOTO BY LAUREN MAYHEW

The Kern Community Tennis Association, although smaller in stature than other organizations, is lobbying a considerable impact on the local student-athletics community. One way it does so is by the distribution of hundreds of items of gear and clothing.

Matthews, president of Kern Community Tennis Association. "They can't afford the court fees and equipment."

The organization was founded in 1965 as the Tennis Patrons of Bakersfield. It eventually merged with the Kern Tennis Council to become KCTA. Its mission is simple: to grow the game of tennis at all levels for both juniors and adults. Besides the gear, the nonprofit has sponsored more than a dozen hours of professional instruction for an estimated 1,200 student-athletes.

KCTA's support extends to local tennis coaches as

well.

"KCTA provides such a strong reinforcement for what we coaches are trying to teach the students," said Cesar Chavez girls' junior varsity team coach Elina Simon. She says she was green as a coach when she began. It had been decades since she played in high school.

"KCTA provided training for the coaches and brought in United States Tennis Association coaches from Southern California," she said. "KCTA has been invaluable. If I didn't have them I wouldn't have survived in coaching."

The Chavez girls' JV

KCTA Awards Night at BTO

When: Wednesday, March 19

Where: Bakersfield Racquet Club, 1660 Pine St.

Information: kerntennis.org

team defied the odds and captured the Division 4 Valley Championship.

"We are changing lives by giving coaches the tools they need to provide a better experience for their players," Matthews said. KCTA measures its impact by the success of schools like Arvin, Cesar Chavez, East and Shafter, teams that have historically not done well. And participation is on the rise. For the first time, North High School added a boys tennis team.

The nonprofit also exposes student-athletes to world-class tennis by hosting events during the Women's Tennis Open last October, and the upcoming Bakersfield Tennis Open the week of March 17 at the Bakersfield Racquet Club.

"As we chase support, we recognize that there is a barrier in having the word 'tennis' in our name," Matthews said. "People think country club and privilege when they hear the word 'tennis.' It couldn't be further from the truth. We are doing the opposite, enabling all students to get a good experience with after-school sports."

Lisa Kimble is an Emmy Award-winning former broadcast journalist who began her career in radio.