

# Changing Young Lives Through Tennis

by Ajay Pant

In 1988, Arthur Ashe, Nick Bollettieri and Bob Davis had a tennis dream. Could tennis be taught and attract athletes from underprivileged backgrounds? More importantly, could tennis be the hook to create more productive young men and women?



**The Ashe-Bollettieri “Cities” program (ABC) started in Newark, New Jersey in September 1988.**

Multiple skeptics reminded Arthur, Nick and Bob that this was not a viable option. Newark in 1988 was a tough city with many unsafe areas with drugs and crime. Amid some of the toughest neighborhoods, trained tennis coaches started teaching underprivileged youth. **The cost – free to all participants.**

**The start was quite difficult.** Kids had never been exposed to tennis, which was perceived as a sissy sport. Moms and dads were skeptical of these strangers teaching tennis for free. To compound the issues, in one or two cases, drug dealers thought we were trying to poach their turf. Some initial lessons were taught with police protection.

Within two months, the kids made us all shine and made every headache worth it. Close to 500 children were playing tennis in Newark parks. Furthermore, surveys conducted with parents and school teachers indicated better focus, improved listening and academic improvement. **Arthur, Nick and Bob’s vision was starting to come to fruition.**



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Page 2



From a teaching perspective, everything boiled down to how much you cared about the kids. No faking – kids can tell. Just non-judgmental and unconditional care. **Tennis became a byproduct.** Yes, we were also bringing sophisticated tennis skills to complement superb athletic abilities. Kids were more driven because tennis became a safe and fun environment.

Many of our teaching pros also chose to start tutoring kids. In addition, off court sessions now included sensitive issues like drugs, gangs and teen pregnancies. We even had experts from local hospitals advise us on how to deliver these important and relevant topics.

**Within a year, Newark was a resounding success by any measure.** The ABC Newark model was duplicated in Kansas City, KS and Kansas City, MO. A year later, Albany, Schenectady and Troy in upstate New York were added to the ABC roster.

Forward to 2023, nearly three decades since we started ABC. **We still stay in touch with many of our kids.** Our kids include Phd's, opera singers, tennis teachers, social workers, financial analysts and other noble professions. Also, equally impressive, many of our kids are now teaching tennis to the next generation of youth.



Like the PTR Foundation, the ABC program was grounded in the premise of growing tennis for everyone. Thanks to corporate and municipal funding, countless lives were saved and molded via tennis. Every teaching pro gave 100% on and off the court. Tutoring and mentoring went way beyond the boundaries of any typical job description.

It's time to make our own story at the PTR Foundation. We are all immensely grateful for tennis in our lives and let's make sure everyone gets to enjoy a similar experience.

Our 2020 Humanitarian Award winner, **Adam Jasick, founder of Future Champions Foundation**, has worked tirelessly to bring school, tennis, water, library, Kitchen, and solar to EPP, Bognari, a small village in TOGO, Africa.

The first day of kindergarten school enrollment was 10. Since 2021, 101 children have enrolled in the kindergarten program. PTR Foundation donated funds to complete the original classroom and it was named "Jardin d'enfants Dennis Van der Meer' don de PTR Foundation" or Dennis Van der Meer Kindergarten by the PTR Foundation.







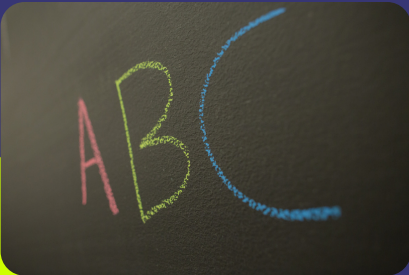
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Page 4



We want to make a similar impact around the globe, but we can't do it alone. The foundation needs your support, collaboration and leadership. **You can be part of a powerful movement, 'A Global Tennis Footprint'!**



Every child in this world learns the rhyme 'A B C D..' Can you imagine if every child gets to experience tennis in their lives? It is as simple as donating a 'cup of Starbucks coffee' amount to the foundation.



**Your support will serve to preserve the legacy of our founder, Dennis Van der Meer.**

Together.. We can make a world of difference by making tennis available to everyone!



Ajay Pant is PTR and USPTA International Master Pro. Ajay is a recipient of PTR/ITA industry commitment award, He is a member of the PTR Foundation Board of Directors and prepared this story for the Foundation, which has a mission of making tennis available to everyone through focusing on supporting coach development and continuing education.

