
2017 KATHY WILLETTE LEADERSHIP SCHOLARSHIP – Essay Winners

KRISTINE PAU (18) – BAY AREA ACES

San Francisco, Calif.

Billie Jean King once said, "Pressure is a privilege". Pressure pushes a person to try and do their best in the moment and produce the greatest results. Only three days, but Junior WTT nationals was like a roller coaster with the sudden-death points, no-ad games, and tiebreakers, but I am grateful to have had an amazing team to share it all with. We were challenged mentally and physically with the close sets and the uncertainty of who the winner for each match would be since the momentum between players could easily shift. Beginning a match with no idea how our opponent played just made the matches more interesting, and we really had to be more focused and ready at point one.

This tournament was an eye opener. The whole team aspect with the players standing by the benches between both courts cheering one another on was something that I had never experienced before. It definitely fired everyone up and gave my teammates motivation to win every point, making every set closer and more exhilarating. For some of our matches, the game count became so close that the mixed doubles sets were the deciding factor. I got to play mixed doubles with my brother, which surprisingly, was not too hard. Yes, at times, we would get frustrated with each other, but we also calmed each other down and talked out strategies. In doubles, teamwork is essential. It was very evident in mixed doubles as both players play a key role. The guy may have the power and the big serves, but the girl must also be prepared for the volley or easy ball to put away.

Another aspect that was focused on was responsibility and communication. Our coach for this event was mainly our parents, so we all stepped up to help decide the lineup for the matches, when to meet up for warm up, and our outfits. The team dynamic was also important. Although some of us met for the first time a day before the tournament started, we all got along and were just very supportive of each other. Every day, I felt that we got closer as a team and just had a lot of fun on and off the court. Everyone had an equal part to play and contributed to our success throughout the tournament.

I wouldn't have wanted to compete in San Diego with any other team. My body is sore, there are ants in my bags, and I am badly sunburnt - yet as I reflect back on Junior WTT Nationals, I would not trade these past few days doing anything else. My team may not have taken the trophy home, but the memories and friendships I gained are the only medals that I need and I have Billie Jean King, Kathy Willette, the staff, our parents, and WTT to thank for this once in a lifetime experience and for making my last junior tennis tournament so memorable.

DAVID AMMENDOLA (17), USTA TEAM EASTERN

Massapequa, N.Y.

WTT Junior Nationals had to be my favorite tournament I've played in so far. It was also an amazing feeling to be able to follow in the footsteps of my sister since she played in this tournament as well growing up.

The level of tennis there was very elite and the competition helped me improve my game. I learned that under the circumstances given (which was one set per match), you have to start out strong. I thought

that the rules were very creative and made the competition so much more fun and different than us junior players are used to. A change up in the game always makes tennis more fun and exciting. The WTT format helped me learn a lot about myself as well and how I handle myself under pressure. The no-ad scoring and having a team depending on you really puts you in a high pressure situation. I learned to play those big deuce points just as any other point in a match.

Another aspect of WTT that I thought was very interesting was the substitutions. I have never experienced anything like that before and honestly I thought it was one of the coolest things. It's a big weapon if you use it correctly. We used substitutions not only when someone was losing but when we wanted to give the other team's player a change of pace to throw them off their game. Another really cool thing about the tournament I also liked was how in order to win the whole match between the two teams you had to have the highest amount of games, not sets won, so you still have the motivation to keep trying and win as many games as you can!

One other rule I loved was how your coach could talk to you after every point necessary to give you quick tips that could really help you in the long run. Without those tips I know I could not have won as many points. Also, the coed team style format was a lot of fun considering we played mixed doubles every day. It was definitely different but very exciting and intense since your incorporating men's and women's doubles into one.

The tennis was amazing but my favorite part of the tournament had to be the times I spent with my team. My teammates and I still stay in touch today we all had a blast in San Diego especially after the tennis when we went to the beach or out to dinner. It was really nice to be able to see San Diego as well the beaches were beautiful and the restaurants downtown were delicious. I also loved the feeling of being independent, playing at the Barnes Center and traveling alone without parents. It really gives you the independence you need in the future if you want to travel for tennis.