

TENNIS

Tradition endures at clay courts

By Chris Merriman
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In 1930, former Duquesne University student Paul G. Sullivan directed the Pittsburgh Parks Championships at the newly constructed Frick Park clay courts for the first time. Today, the annual amateur tournament continues to honor the legacy of the longtime Pittsburgh native who organized the event every year until 2001.

The 2010 Paul G. Sullivan Clay Court Championships, renamed in Sullivan's memory after his death in 2002, begin today at the Frick Park clay courts.

The tournament, which is open to all amateur players in Western Pennsylvania age 16 and older, features open men's and women's singles and doubles, open mixed doubles and men's and women's senior singles for players 50 and over. Weekday matches begin in the late afternoon, while weekend matches run all day. Entry fees are \$10 for singles and \$15 per doubles team, and all of the tournament's proceeds benefit the Frick Park clay courts.

The tournament's history is inextricably tied to Sullivan, who competed in the event into his 90s, and to the Frick Park clay courts, which hosted every event organized by Sullivan and are the last public clay courts in Pittsburgh.

"There's something special about these courts. People noted it when they were [first completed], and they still do," said tournament director Jose Mieres,

who is also president of the Frick Park Clay Court Tennis Club. "We have people that come to the courts who have memories from a long time ago. They are happy that we are making the court shine again."

At the time of the Frick Park courts' construction, clay courts held a special role in society.

"This tournament not only showcased the courts and Frick Park, but it also had a mission to make tennis available to more people than had before. Clay courts were the surface that brought tennis to the masses. Before clay courts, tennis was played on lawns, and lawns were really the surfaces of royalty before clay," said Mieres, who researched the tournament's history using the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's microfilm collection.

Mieres said the Frick Park clay courts deteriorated beginning in the 1970s, and were further hurt after Sullivan's death in 2002 and the passing of fellow Pittsburgh amateur tennis giant Bill Colbert that same year.

After five years at Schenley Park, the tournament returned to Frick Park in 2007 after volunteer restoration by the Frick Park Clay Court Tennis Club. The city of Pittsburgh had planned to convert the clay courts to a hard surface, but club members attended a public hearing of the Allegheny County Regional Asset District board in the fall, and convinced the board to save the courts. The Frick Park Clay

Court Tennis Club received the 2007 Community Tennis Association of the Year Award from the United States Tennis Association Allegheny Mountain District for their efforts.

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