

# DAILY NEWS

## New tennis initiative will level the court for all

**E**very summer, the U.S. Open brings the world's best tennis players to Queens. For three weeks, New York City is the sport's capital. Its biggest matches are played in Arthur Ashe Stadium, named for the tennis legend who broke barriers on and off the court. But in many of the neighborhoods Ashe cared most about – places where opportunities are limited and courts are scarce – tennis has not always been easy to access.

Ashe co-founded New York Junior Tennis & Learning (NYJTL) more than 50 years ago with the belief that the sport could be a pathway to opportunity for young people. That vision is still our guide today. But in much of our city, kids who want to play can't find a court. Families don't know where to start. Coaches are in short supply. And without consistent exposure or access to tennis, many young people never get the chance to discover their potential through the sport.

This week, the USTA Foundation, the social impact arm of the United States Tennis Association (USTA), announced that NYJTL has been selected as one of the country's first Community Impact Hubs. This bold new initiative is designed to leverage the power of tennis to grow the game in under-resourced communities, offering young people and families unparalleled opportunities to play, learn, and thrive, right where they live.

As a USTA Foundation Community Impact Hub, NYJTL will serve as an anchor for broader community connection while helping meet high levels of unmet demand and supporting the USTA's broader "35 by '35" goal: growing tennis participation to 35 million Americans by the year 2035.

Locally, that means tackling the barriers that keep too many New Yorkers from the game – improving and building courts, training coaches, supporting tennis throughout the school day, and creating ways for families to get involved – so that tennis can truly be a sport for everyone.

Through this initiative, NYJTL will bring its programming to new schools and expand offerings at existing school sites throughout the city. It will also provide professional development training to more New York City public school P.E. teachers, enabling them to teach the sport during their classes.

Family engagement will be a key focus, with regular events at after-school programs and grassroots tennis sites so that parents, siblings, and guardians can get

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**BY UDAI TAMBAR**

on the court together. To ensure we have the people to deliver these programs, we will train dozens of new coaches – including afterschool staff and grassroots program instructors – in a "mentorship first" approach that supports youth development in the coming months.

This is just the start. In the years ahead, NYJTL will work with the USTA Foundation and our partners in city government to help address New York City's shortage of quality courts in neighborhoods where investment has lagged.

Too often, kids in these communities see locked gates, cracked asphalt, and faded lines instead of playable courts. The Community Impact Hub initiative is committed to changing that, while ensuring that every court investment is paired with programming and open access to the community.

The benefits will extend far beyond the court. Research shows that tennis builds not only physical fitness but also cognitive skills that transfer to the classroom. Studies from the USTA and the Women's Sports Foundation have found that youth who play tennis are more likely to earn higher grades, have greater self-confidence, and persist through challenges.

Athletes are also more likely to attend college compared to their peers who do not play sports. At NYJTL, we see these benefits every day – students developing resilience, setting bigger goals for themselves, and believing they have the tools to reach them.

We are a city that loves tennis, but we've also long been a city of stark inequities in who gets to play. As a Community Impact Hub, NYJTL will build on years of work to close that gap, helping us reach more neighborhoods and sustain access all year long and for years to come.

As the world turns its attention to Arthur Ashe Stadium, we'll be celebrating the champions on court. But we'll also be honoring Ashe's legacy by looking ahead to the champions we haven't met yet – the ones who will discover the game because a court was built in their neighborhood, a coach believed in them, and their family got the chance to join in.

*Tambar is the president and CEO of New York Junior Tennis and Learning.*