



## A 25 Year Journey to the National Championship



Sunnyvale Northern California 65+ 3.5 Section Champions--Left to right: Jim Connor, Po Chen, co-captain Robert Brown, captain Larry Hayes, Shyamal Kanoo, Tom Trankle, Larry Namekata, Ron Eng. Not pictured: Merrill Clum, Bill Moniz, Larry White and Bob Ziegler

### Follow Your Dream.

Every year for the past 25 years, Larry Hayes dreamed of captaining and playing in an USTA National Championship. It is the dream of every USTA tennis player.

What he didn't know that it would take 25 years, 50 teams and more than 500 players to get there!

Larry's dream finally came true this year when his 65+ 3.5 Sunnyvale team won the Northern California Section Championship, advancing to the National Championship for the first time ever.

#### Did You Think You Wouldn't Make It?

"I never stopped believing or trying but realized at age 75, time was running out," Hayes said. "In the past three years, our 55+ teams have been to the Section finals twice—once this year. Both times, we lost in tiebreakers. This time our 65+ team won the tiebreakers so the gods were finally on our side."

"Although I believe it's about the journey and not the destination,

I'm very happy for myself and for my teammates to get to the Nationals. Made sweeter because it took so long!"

Larry is the oldest guy on the team but isn't intimidated playing doubles against guys 10, 20 or 30+ years younger. Many times he wins.

#### What's It Like Playing Against Someone Young Enough to be Your Son?

"Feels good and happy to be a role model," says Hayes. "We played a 7.5 team this year with no one older than 30. Their young captain commented: 'I hope we play as well as you guys when we get your age.'" (We lost to them 2-1 in a tiebreaker.)

"You can't beat younger guys by trying to 'out hit' them. They're way too strong, too fast and will overpower you. You have to 'senior

ball" and "outsmart" them with strategy and tactics such as soft returns, lobs, angles and drop shots."

"But it's rewarding and fun playing against guys of all ages," says Hayes who captained and played on four 2014 USTA teams—55+, 65+, 70+ and 7.5 combo which has no age restrictions.

Youngest player on Hayes' 7.5 team is Tom Lessler, 23, who plays with his dad Larry, 59. Playing with his son is very special.

#### What Are the Secrets of Playing into Your 70s and Beyond?

"I thank my lucky stars that I'm still able to play health wise. USTA is not social tennis and has many strong players. Men and women."

"Through the years, I've become wiser and wrote a book (unpublished) entitled: "Geezer Tennis."

## GEEZER TENNIS RULES:

- 1 *Play no more than two times a week*
- 2 *Never play two days in a row—your body needs time to rest and heal*
- 3 *Play no more than two matches per day. In my younger years, I played 3 to 4 matches a day. Do that now and I risk serious injury*
- 4 *Listen to your body. If something hurts, stop playing immediately and seek treatment*
- 5 *Apply ice to sore muscles after each match. Take a pain relief med like Aleve. The pain in my right shoulder has never completely gone away. But it doesn't hurt when I play so I've learned to live with it. It's a small price to pay for something you love.*
- 6 *Play to win, enjoy every match and count your blessings—especially playing in the 70+ league because there are only 1,500 70 and over players in all of Northern California. There are no playoffs or tournaments and less pressure to win.*

"70+ players are just happy to be playing a sport they love."

"When I first started playing in the 70+ league, I thought this is going to be easy playing against these really "old guys. Wrong!"

"Players in their 70s are very good, mentally tough and competitive. They know all the "senior tricks," including how to conserve their energy."

### What's It Like to Captain 50 teams and 500+ Players Over 25 Years?

"It's a big challenge. You're dealing with many strong egos and personalities. Every player needs to be treated with respect...and appreciated. I've had a few, high maintenance players on my teams but 99% of all USTA players are good guys—competitive but good sports—win or lose. All have the same goal—get to the Nationals."

"I love the competitiveness and the special bonding with my teammates. Several guys on my current 65+ team—Po Chen, Larry Namekata and



Larry Namekata, 68 Photo: Steve Goldband



Po Chen, 66 Photo: Steve Goldband

Ron Eng— were on my adult teams 20 years ago. We have "aged together" and become good friends."

### How Long Do You Plan to Play USTA?

"85 is a good target to shoot for. I understand that every time I step on the tennis courts, it could be my last match. Players have died on the courts from heart attacks, although rare.

"After each match (win or lose) I tell my teammates and opponents:

"No One Got Injured. No One Died. Good Match!"

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### Injuries?

"Injuries are very common among players over 50. You're constantly moving on the courts and prone to tennis elbow, back, ankle, knee and shoulder injuries."

"So far, I've been lucky avoiding major injuries, although I was off tennis for a year recovering from a strained rotator cuff 20 years ago. I didn't listen to my body and tried to play through the pain."

### Advice?

"Never give up. Stay positive. Keep moving. Life is short for all of us."

Larry and his teammates travel to Surprise, AZ in March 2015 to compete for a National Championship. The journey continues.

### About Larry Hayes

Besides playing USTA tennis two to three times a week, Larry is the owner/publisher of ActiveOver50 media company. He is also president of the Bay Area Sportfishers club and lawn bowls with his wife Gloria one to two times a week. He is a board advisor to nonprofit Vision Literacy. You can reach him at Larry@ActiveOver50.com or 408.921.5806.



USTA League is the country's largest recreational tennis league with more than 825,000 participants nationwide. The 65+ is the fastest growing USTA league with over 32,000 players—up 16% since 2010. For more information, visit <http://www.norcal.usta.com/adultleagues>