

# Smith On Hand For Anderson's Coaching Debut

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Jay Young



*Former Southwestern tennis coaches Rod Beckerink, left, and Anne Tenney Smith, center, are pictured with new coach Tom Anderson prior to the Trojans' girls match against Fredonia on Wednesday. P-J photo by Jay Young*

While it was the 2017 girls tennis season kicking off at Southwestern High School on a blustery Wednesday afternoon, there was also another year from decades earlier that made this particular start to the Lady Trojans' campaign even more special.

That year was 1974, when newly named Southwestern girls tennis coach Tom Anderson was a sophomore and the top player at the school. Despite his love for the game and talent on the courts, Anderson found himself in a bind.

"I was the No. 1 player and we didn't have a tennis coach," Anderson recalled in front of fans and former Trojans on Wednesday. "I was kind of worried, and then all of a sudden, I hear we had one."

While Anderson knew at that time he finally had what he needed to continue his career, what he didn't know was that he would soon be under the tutelage of Anne Tenney Smith, who would go on to become a local pioneer in the world of tennis coaching all the way to her induction into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame in 2005.

Anderson recalls mistakenly hearing the new coach's name was Anne "Tennis" and thinking that may have been a fortuitous sign of things to come — it turns out he was right either way.

With Anderson's first match as head coach of the Lady Trojans, and Smith's return to the courts where she racked up an astounding record of 577-104, the path between teacher and student came full circle.

“The boys team, she won 77 matches in a row — 77 in a row — the girls I think she had 36 in a row,” Anderson remembered of his former coach’s tenure. “She started girls tennis (at Southwestern). There was no girls tennis. She not only taught me how to play the game, she taught me good sportsmanship.”

To be certain, Anderson was not the only one recalling the lessons of his former coach on Wednesday and reminiscing of the days when she and Trojans were all but unbeatable on the courts.

In attendance for the season opener were many of Smith’s former players, hitting partners and admirers. Looking back on all her years of success and the way that she learned to play the game from other local legends, the former coach reflected on the early days.

“I’ve played tennis since I was 12. That’s a long time,” Smith recalled. “I was in Jamestown. There was a guy named Kenny Johnson who taught tennis over at Lincoln Junior High and I started playing there. And then we would go over to Allen Park, (which) had clay courts, and actually my mentors at that time were Len Johnson, Nelson Turnell and Neoma Berg, who were well-known tennis players in the area. They really got people to play because you would go over and didn’t have a partner, and they’d make sure you had partners. They taught me everything that I knew.”

Little did Smith know in those first days of hitting that she would go on to join the likes of Johnson, Turnell and Berg in the Chautauqua County Sports Hall of Fame.

The Lady Trojans under Smith compiled a record of 270-34 from 1977-2001, while the boys team posted a record of 307-70, with 17 league titles apiece.

Like so many of her former coaches and pupils, Smith’s fervor for the game has not waned in recent years.

Tennis, unlike so many of the other sports that players enjoy in their early years, is a game that can be played more or less for life.

That is exactly what Smith plans to do, as she currently plays four times a week on four different competitive teams near Tampa, Florida.

“I know all kinds of people who are playing,” she said. “I’m 70, they’re in their 80s. I mean all ages are playing, and that’s what’s great about the game.”