



Dad's Ring Motivated Gale's Successful Run

By John Packett, RTA Contributing Writer

September 18, 2017

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After she swept all three titles in the Davenport City Tennis Championships in 1993, Rachel Gale dedicated the tournament to the memory of her father, Les, who had just passed away earlier that year in Brockport, I

Gale wore her father's wedding ring
The little bundle of energy also claim

Close vns and finished runner-up twice.

"He was always my number one fan," said Gale. "He was always the one I wanted to win for. He always wanted me to do really well. He did so much for me in my younger years, learning how to play and taking me places, that I just wanted to win for him."



Gale went on to capture the state hardcourt championship once (and finish second four times), the state clay courts twice and the state indoor two times during an illustrious singles career. She also won too many doubles titles to count.

Suffice to say, Gale has done her father proud, with all of those singles and doubles championships since he died of cancer at 62.

For all of her accomplishments during a 14-year run, Gale will be inducted into the Richmond Tennis Hall of Fame during a gala celebration and dinner Oct. 28 at the Westwood Club. Tickets are now on sale at richmondtennis.org.

Gale arrived in Richmond in 1990, transferring from Fairleigh Dickinson to Virginia Commonwealth University, where she played No. 1 singles and doubles for coach Eva Bard, and was an assistant coach her final year.

"I had done everything I could at Fairleigh Dickinson," said Gale. "I had won the ECAC Metro Conference championship in singles and doubles. I had been most valuable two years in a row as the No. 1 player. So I wanted to be challenged.

"I knew I wanted to teach tennis, so I wanted to be where it was warmer, and I was looking down south when I found VCU. I went to a college showcase and couldn't play in it, but I got to talking with her [Bard] and she recruited me."

Gale's first foray into the city tournament didn't result in a title but she finished runner-up to Valerie Farmer in 1992.

"Even though I lost, I got my picture on the front [sports] page of the paper that said the agony of defeat," recalled Gale, 48, who is now a teaching pro at Farmington Country Club in Charlottesville. "I was on the ground looking at the tennis ball. It was funny."

The following year, Gale defeated VCU teammate Ivi Moorlat in the final.

"She was younger than I was," said Gale. "She was better than me. Beating her was a big deal. My father had died in February, and I was able to tell him I was playing for him just before he passed away. I put on his wedding ring after he passed away.

"I feel like putting on his wedding ring was the key to my success the rest of my life because I played amazing tennis after that."

While she didn't reach the final again until 1997, Gale continued to sling her body around the court, playing her signature serve-and-volley style. Whether it was hard or soft courts, Gale didn't mind diving after returns — and sometimes drawing blood.

"I served and volleyed a lot in singles, and of course doubles," she said. "I really enjoyed coming up to the net. I was a soccer goalie, so my thought is I really enjoyed the ball coming at me. I'd rather be up at the net than I would be on the baseline when I was learning how to play.

"It took a while for me to learn ground strokes. Volleys came easy to me. I just learned backwards. The net first and then the baseline."

After back-to-back titles in '97 and '98 over Kirsten Elim, Gale finished runner-up to Bridget Bruner (now Reichert) in 2001. She returned to the winner's circle in 2003, and again in 2005 and 2006. If not for a loss to Lindsey Wyeth in the 2004 final, she would have won four in a row.

Gale finished one short of the all-time tournament record for women's singles titles (seven) held by Margaret Anderson.



"She was one of the few women who served and volleyed pretty much all the time," said Cappellino, her frequent mixed partner. "Her volleys were so good. Her serve, being a lefty, was so tough to return. It helped serving to men as well as women.

"One of the best things about her is she could also play from the baseline. She had great ground strokes. She was very smart and obviously very aggressive at the net poaching. I've never known anyone to fight harder trying to win a point, a game, a match.

"She wore her emotions on her sleeve. She was just so versatile. She could do it from the baseline. She could come to the net. She was really fun to play with. Good gravy, she was so good. But I think I was the calming aspect of the team because she was so intense."

Her final championship came when she was 37, and included the women's doubles and mixed that year, the third time she accomplished that feat.

"In 1993 I won all three. In 2003, I won all three events and then I did it again in 2006," she said. "That's when I decided, that's it. I came into the city tournament winning all three for my Dad, and I'm going to go out winning all three for my Dad.

"I knew I wouldn't play another city tournament after 2006, no matter what. It was the perfect time for me to stop playing the city."

And so she didn't. But by then, she had amassed a Hall of Fame career — and then some.

As far as the state hardcourts is concerned, she has won 10 titles, including the city tournament runner-up the next three years.

The state indoor titles came a few years later.

Even though she has reached "senior" status, she continues to play in the Richmond area and has been teaming with former partner Julie Osborne. The duo finished runner-up in each division this year.

Close

"My Mom was diagnosed in 2011 with Alzheimer's, and she has diabetes," said Gale. "She came to live with me and my wife, Rose, for a year. Now she's in an assisted living facility in Standardsville, which is about a half hour from Farmington.

"I visit her a lot. She's my priority. I take her to all her doctor's appointments. So I've bowed out of playing tennis so I can spend time with her. I'm also doing a lot of teaching and working at the club, so I just play that one tournament a year right now."

In 2009, Gale captained the United States' 40s team to a bronze medal in the World Games, beating Spain in Mallorca, Spain.

Could she have conceived of this much success when she left Brockport for Richmond in 1990, resulting in a Hall of Fame career?

"I never would have imagined that," she said, getting a little teary-eyed. "I just wanted to always play the best I could. When I was in junior tournaments, I knew how badly my Dad wanted me to play, and I couldn't quite beat some of the top players.

"But I just knew I wanted to give 100 percent of myself every tournament I played in. I love to play tournaments. I never looked ahead 20 years to think about a Hall of Fame for tennis. I would have wiggled out if I thought about it.

"Looking back at my life, there is nothing else I could really want. This is just icing on the cake."



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