

My Tennis Journey: Finding My Inner Serena



I tried something new. As a 48-year-old working mother of three, I took a leap this year. I joined and captained a ladies weekend United States Tennis Association (USTA) league team. To cope with the isolation and baking spree induced weight gain of the COVID pandemic, I picked up a racket and experienced the exhilaration of hitting a fuzzy yellow ball. I loved running around on the court, sweating, and doing it with other women who seemed to need the physical outlet and social connection

as much as I did. I looked up to this diverse group of women and our friendships deepened with every fun and new adventure. Being a part of a team sport as an adult pushed me to do things I would never have done alone.

During the league matches we won and lost with grit and determination and earned a wildcard entry in the sectionals tournament at the end of the season. We would be competing against all the best ladies' teams at our level in Washington and Oregon. In the months of practice leading up to this moment, I realized the problem with my tennis game was that I was scared. Specifically, I was scared of hitting the ball because I didn't believe in myself.

Standing at the baseline in the seconds it took the ball to come toward me, I would get paralyzed in self-doubt. Fundamental to tennis is swinging the racket in a consistent way to hit the ball. I looked around and everyone was seemingly doing it with an easy child-like fervor. For me every forehand and backhand shot was a mental battle, and I was losing. Instead of hitting the ball solidly with a full swing, I would tentatively stick my arm out and the ball would drop miserably into the net. I hid my Achilles by compensating with strong volleys at the net or by managing to place the ball strategically into the open court on the other side.

It was Sectionals finals, a sunny outdoor match in Portland, Oregon. We had come so far compared to where we started. My doubles match was against a team we had played before and lost.

Our opponents were Katie and Jean. Katie was a tall volleyball player who liked to smash balls at the net and was undefeated. Jean was spunky and chatty, someone who felt familiar with a warm smile. My 58-year-old 108-pound doubles partner Meijean has a quiet strength, a powerful forehand, and never seems stressed. This moment and this sport pushed me to overcome my sinking sensation.

I decided it was time to hit the ball fearlessly. Every time I hit the ball it felt so good to harness what had always been inside me and channel it into each point. I grunted. I hit winning shots. I was focused only on being strong and free, believing in myself, and everything else dissolved away for those two hours. We won our match. My teammates jokingly called me, "Serena" which made me laugh.

My team won the USTA 18 and over 2.5 sectionals tournament earning the spot to represent the Pacific Northwest at the USTA Nationals

Tournament in Oklahoma City in October of our team's first year of USTA tennis. We ended up as a top 10 team in the country, a remarkable accomplishment for our scrappy and determined team. It was that match that day in Portland that was my personal turning point. I won my mental battle – my powerful and confident self defeated my inner scared little kid.

The sport of tennis taught me to believe in myself on and off the court – to speak up at work meetings, to advocate for justice in my own authentic way, to put myself out there and express love and compassion for my husband who has supported me on this journey, and to hit the ball without self-judgment. Tennis is a metaphor for life, and for me, every time I hit the ball it reinforces the part of me that I want to set free.

Una Lee, MD is a urologist who specializes in reconstructive surgery for women's pelvic floor problems and serves as Urology Physician Lead at Virginia Mason Franciscan Health in Seattle, Washington. She plays tennis with her husband Oliver and 3 sons Ethan, Elliot, and Everett at the Mercer Island Country Club.



Thanks to Una for sharing her inspirational tennis story. We really appreciate the opportunity to share her amazing journey with our readers.

If you have a story that you would like to share with our tennis community, please reach out. We would love to hear from you. Maybe you too have found your inner Serena?