



How it all Began...
A Quick History of the Georgia Professional Tennis Association

By Dunn Neugebauer

The plan was simply to meet out for dinner after a long, hot day on the tennis courts. “Peter” (Howell) and I just shared ideas over dinner that night; compared notes from our experiences from the current ALTA season, and swapped stories,” Pride Evans remembered. “After a while a light bulb went off inside both of our heads. What if, we both agreed, tennis pros met once a month at a convenient location just to share ideas and maybe start a co-op buying program.”

As for Peter, he had been informally meeting with fellow pros Jon Niemeyer, Cindy Brady and Joe Dennis down at Druid Hills. The four would simply talk and discuss the days in the life in the tennis world. After his “staff meeting” with Pride over dinner, a plan emerged.

“The tennis boom had taken effect,” Howell remembered. “League tennis had just started here in 1971, and there became more of a need for a different type of tennis pro than the ones that simply taught lessons all day. There was no such thing as the tennis director position back in 1972 and there were only two pros in the area over 40 years old. It was time for the tennis industry to morph into something bigger.”

Of the two, Pride – then the assistant pro at Dunwoody Country Club - was the one who had access to a copier and a secretary, so he immediately went to work. Letters were sent, phone calls were made and the first ever meeting (it was the Atlanta Professional Tennis Association at the time), was held Saturday, May 4th 1977 at the Atlanta Athletic Club. “Seven people were there, but four more had told us they wanted to join,” Howell continued. “We elected board members that night – I was the president; Pride was the secretary and on down the line. The next day after the meeting, a pro came up to me and said, ‘I hear you guys started something last night, here are my membership dues.’”

The bylaws were also laid down that night, and it was determined one had to have three letters from existing pros as your recommendations to get in. The bottom line: the membership of 11 has turned into a membership of more than 225-plus at one point; and the GPTA (Georgia Professional Tennis Association) is still a vital part of the tennis world.

True, the faces have changed over the years but the efficiency has not. Lectures, marketing, pro shop and teaching tips, networking for jobs – this and more happens at your typical meeting. If nothing else, it’s a great way to unwind after a tough week on the courts.

Though the 70s are now long gone, the GPTA, Howell and Evans are still going strong. Howell is the current men’s and women’s tennis coach at Oglethorpe University; Evans is the Director of Tennis at the King & Prince down in St. Simons. As for the GPTA, it is as popular as ever, still providing a springboard for new and old tennis professionals who want to continue to learn, grow and network in the industry.

Thanks, Pride and Peter, for your vision.
The Georgia tennis world is still appreciative!