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## Tennis Program Serves Up Character

By JORDAN MILES

BUCKINGHAM — It began with minimal interest on a cold February morning in 2010. Some thought the idea was a “love-love” at first, meaning a scoreless match in tennis lingo.

In other words, pointless.

And, only four years later, it would become a love—in the more commonly used sense—for hundreds of students in Buckingham County. Game, set, and match in the form of success for the QuickStart Tennis after school program at Buckingham County Primary School.

The activity is among several others such as soccer and karate that are funded through the school’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century After School Program grant, says tennis instructor and paraprofessional Zelda Maxie, who’s been involved in the program for three years now.

“Alright guys, are we ready?” Maxie, donning a silver whistle, shouted as the second graders scurried to finish getting the small net assembled in the middle of the gym floor.

“I developed a love of tennis when I was at Piedmont [Community College]...I’ve always loved the game,” Maxie told *The Herald* recently. “Once I started doing the after school program...Mr. [Richard] Michaels, he’s a retired colonel...was the tennis coach then, and I [became] his assistant.”

As Maxie, who’s been with the school division for 10 years, continued to learn about the sport and watched the students grow while assisting Richards, she attended many workshops, and eventually was asked to lead the program at the primary school.

“He suggested me,” she said. “It was six courses. And it was kind of hard, but you know, it was a wonderful thing,” she smiled, referring to the number of workshops she attended.

QuickStart Tennis of Central Virginia notes on their website, “Buckingham County is proof that patience, persistence, and planting seeds pay off.”

The program currently has about 25 second graders in it, and is offered twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Maxie says that teacher Alex Llewellyn, who serves as one of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant coordinators, and other school staff, send out letters informing students and their parents about the availability of the activities, and they get to pick.

“This will be their third semester with me,” Maxie said of some of the kids. “It’s great playing with them, because they know all the rules...You see their progression. They couldn’t even serve a ball and now they’re serving the ball and swinging the [racket]. It’s really a great, great program.”



During one of the stations the students participate in, second grader Gabby Mondragon lobs a tennis ball against a wall to enhance her skills of precision and movement, hoping to apply them when playing on the court. (Photos by Jordan Miles)

The program isn’t solely based on the game of tennis, Maxie affirmed.

“It helps to build up their character. It helps to build up enthusiasm. They love making new friends. They have learned to get along and play fair. So, it’s not just about the tennis...It’s way more than the tennis. They’re great listeners,” she said, adding that the second graders she’s currently coaching have made great progress.

Students involved in the program also spend part of their after school time doing homework in a classroom, she said. Half of the group will do homework for the first part of the allotted time, then they’ll switch.

Maxie says there’s a waiting list to get into the tennis program, and they rotate the students from sport to sport, switching between grades often.

“These kids don’t get bored... They have a lot of energy,” she related.

Once in the gym, Maxie separates the students into stations situated along the walls of the gym. Each station focuses on different aspects and skills of the game, including agility, balance, and precision. While three of the stations are scattered about, the fourth is on the court, actually playing the game.

Among the hip-hop, upbeat music, Maxie blew her whistle, indicating to the students that they needed to rotate and switch stations.

“They’re never bored in here,” she reiterated as she swatted her racket towards a ball that a student had just lobbed towards her.

As she played with three students on the court, other students were bouncing and balancing tennis balls with their rackets, while others volleyed the ball off the wall. Some bounced balls up and

down off of the floor.

“Awesome job, guys,” she said as one little girl bounced the ball into the air several times with her racket without letting it fall to the ground.

According to the program’s website, Buckingham Primary was home to QuickStart of Central Virginia’s first national junior tennis and learning chapter, “and is still going strong.”



Part of the after school program involves students learning and working together to set up the tennis net, preparing each station with needed materials, and distributing rackets to their peers.



Amina Lee (left), an after school program assistant, shows second graders KaTiyah Nicholas (middle) and Thomas Smith (right) how to continuously bounce a ball off of the ground.