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## **ASU Mid-South, USTA Working Together to Boost Tennis**

Arkansas State University Mid-South and the United States Tennis Association are working together to enhance exposure to and interest in the lifetime sport in Eastern Arkansas.

Chris Stuart, Tennis Service Representative for the USTA Southern Region, met recently with Dr. Cliff Jones, ASU Mid-South Senior Vice Chancellor for Learning and Instruction, and Chris Parker, ASU Mid-South Athletic Director and Physical Education Lead Faculty, to discuss opportunities to elevate the game locally.

“We’re sitting in a prime location to match up with some of the outreach that the USTA provides,” said Jones, who has played the sport for more than 30 years. “We have a reinvigorated tennis team at West Memphis High School and an active tennis program at Marion High School. We also



have a student population at ASU Mid-South that is eager to be engaged in something, and we have a beautiful park in close proximity to our campus. We’re just looking for more young people to be exposed to the sport.”

“I love tennis,” added Parker who has played the game for 30+ years as well. “I took lessons from a pro growing up, and I’d like to incorporate the game into the courses we offer now and also offer a stand-alone, one-hour course. I’m looking for ideas to structure the class to create the most appealing environment so more people would want to play. It’s a great game, and I think our students would enjoy learning more about it.”

Stuart offered several suggestions to get the tennis ball rolling.

“I think the best place to start is an in-service/professional development workshop for physical education teachers and tennis coaches in your area,” he said. “We previously did these only for PE teachers in elementary, junior, and high schools, but the last couple of years we’ve made them available for colleges, both for their coaches and their students interested in becoming coaches.

“Our three-hour workshop meets all of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) standards, and we use nationally recognized curriculum. We work with physical education teachers on how to include tennis in their curricula for the kids. We provide the equipment and don’t charge anything for our services. All we require is that a minimum of 15 coaches, teachers, and/or students participate.”

ASU Mid-South students in the spring semester Health and Physical Education classes will also participate in this one day event and learn from the instruction provided by the by USTA-Arkansas. The workshop for students, coaches, and PE teachers will focus on drills and activities that can be shared with aspiring tennis players of all ages.

“We make it fun for them, and we make it hands on,” Stuart said. “It can be as simple as you want or as big as you want.”

Interestingly, the preferred venue for such a workshop is not a tennis facility.

“We really like doing the training sessions inside gyms,” Stuart said. “We try to avoid tennis courts because most teachers don’t have courts to work with. They use gymnasiums, cafeterias, or whatever they have.”

Stuart said the professional development sessions have met with good response in every instance.

“We’ve always received extremely positive feedback from teachers because they say, ‘This is stuff we need; this is stuff we do with our kids day in and day out.’ They have told us that some of their professional development amounts to little more than sitting in a classroom and taking notes about stuff that doesn’t even pertain to anything they’re doing with the kids. That drives them insane.”

ASU Mid-South is looking at a day in late April or early May for the in-service training, and more details will be announced later. The college is also working toward a February organizational meeting date that would coincide with the Memphis Open tennis tournament presented by ServiceMASTER (Feb. 6-14).

“We thought this could be a terrific opportunity to send folks to the tournament,” Jones said.

As part of the in-service training next spring, physical education teachers, coaches, and students will learn a new, more relevant instructional approach to the sport, Stuart said.

“The way it’s being taught for kids as well as adults with no prior experience is changing. We don’t start everyone on a standard 78-foot court, and we don’t use the same racquets or same balls for every level. We now utilize a ROGY system – red, orange, green, and yellow – which helps first timers learn much quicker and experience success much sooner.”

Beginners start on a court about half the size of a traditional tennis surface and use red tennis balls that are slightly larger than standard ones. When players progress, they move to a 60-foot court and use orange tennis balls. The third stage includes a regulation tennis court with green tennis balls, and the fourth features the full court with a standard ball.

“It allows players to take baby steps, and the pathway is a lot of fun for people new to the game,” Stuart said.

“I can see where that would be a lot more enjoyable for students, a lot more engaging,” Parker said. “Sometimes new players are more inclined to give up on a regular court with regulation equipment, but the ROGY system would keep their interest and enthusiasm at a higher level. That sounds like a great approach to me.”

Stuart said ASU Mid-South should also consider a Tennis on Campus club in the future, and he recommended the pursuit of grants for diversity/multicultural and children’s events.

For information about sports opportunities or to express interest in the tennis collaboration, please email Parker at [crparker@midsouthcc.edu](mailto:crparker@midsouthcc.edu). For general information about ASU Mid-South, visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis, call or email Enrollment Services at (870) 733-6728 or [admissions@midsouthcc.edu](mailto:admissions@midsouthcc.edu), or see college’s website at [www.asumidsouth.edu](http://www.asumidsouth.edu).