

## Author's Book "It's Game Time Somewhere" Highlights The Ojai

Among the proliferation of sports leagues and sporting events in this country, The Ojai is that timeless, diamond-in-the-rough type of event that transcends eras and continues to build on its lasting sporting legacy. This is exactly what author Tim Forbes discovered while conducting research for his new book, *It's Game Time Somewhere* (Bascom Hill Publishing, [www.itsgametimesomewhere.com](http://www.itsgametimesomewhere.com)), released in February 2013.

In fact, The Ojai – North America's longest running amateur tennis tournament at the same site, now in its 113<sup>th</sup> year – inspired Forbes to dedicate an entire chapter in his recently-released book to the event, which provided him with the understanding of the ties that can bind communities through the spirit of sport.

With only a notebook and a camera, Forbes traveled across the United States and into Canada; to 100 different games covering 50 different sports. Each game is part of Forbes' journey to reach into the heart of North America, into the games that played out every day far beyond any television cameras.

Through his travels, Forbes waxes in prose on the venerable Ojai and its sense of community with reverence. He indulges about Ventura County's sporting spectacle in the following passages from his book:

### **(Observations on discovering The Ojai's home)**

*"Not only were there athletes out there in the sports hinterlands thriving without the visibility I had mistakenly considered essential to sustain them, but there were all kinds of kindred spirits out there with them! Entire communities exist that are based almost entirely upon a shared passion for a given sport, however invisible it may be to the rest of us ... For a sheer feel-good bear hug of a community embrace, though, nothing comes close to what I inadvertently stumbled onto in the hills of SoCal's Ventura County.*

*"What did seem unusual to me as I navigated California Route 150 into Ojai, however, was how little effort had gone into promoting the Pac-10 Championships. Not a single sign or banner. As I got closer to the picturesque town center, it became obvious that something called "The Ojai" was a much bigger priority that weekend. The whole place looked like the Fourth of July, except that banners proclaiming support for The Ojai assumed the traditional role of flags and bunting. And everybody had turned out. There were lines to get into at least two celebratory pancake breakfasts that I passed, and parking was hard to come by."*

### **(On receiving his humble introduction to The Ojai)**

*"I intercepted the first passer-by that glanced my way. "Excuse me – can you help me find Libbey Park? I'm here to see the Pac-10 Tennis Championships, but all I've been able to spot are signs for The Ojai." Finally he said simply, "Well, you're definitely not from around here. And I'm guessing you're not a tennis guy." I came clean on both accounts, and his steely gaze relaxed. "The Pac-10s are a part of The Ojai. And you're*

*standing in front of Libbey Park.” Oh. And that was how I arrived at the pearly gates of tennis heaven.*

*“I thanked my personal St. Peter, crossed a small grassy quad, and entered a green thicket that stood as the entrance of the 110th presentation of The Ojai. That is not a typo. This grand dame of tennis tournaments has been in existence for longer than a century. To put this legacy in perspective, consider that when the first Ojai was conducted in 1895, the state of California was only 45 years old. I thought I was coming to a collegiate tennis championship, but I wound up stumbling across a phenomenon of civic spirit. Purchasing my admission ticket opened the gates to an environment that was fantastic, idyllic, bucolic—pick any ic word you want (the good ones, I mean). And, oh yeah, the tennis was pretty good too.”*

**(On the sights and sounds he witnessed at The Ojai)**

*“The Ojai is a veritable smorgasbord of competitive tennis ... And it’s a big party. The sheer number of matches contested over a four-day time period is mind-boggling, and during the initial rounds of the event, tennis courts all over the Ojai Valley are pressed into service. If you live there and have a decent-size property, there’s a pretty good chance you’ll awake on Thursday to a match being played in your backyard.*

*“This town doesn’t just embrace their signature event; it’s lodged in their DNA. As sporting events go, The Ojai long ago reached critical mass, and the town could no sooner decide not to hold the event than could the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club decide to take a year or two off from hosting the Wimbledon Championships. Past generations of tournament organizers would spin in their graves. And so tasked with keeping a tradition that dates back to the presidency of Grover Cleveland (his second one, Communities of Sport 216 for you history buffs), Ojai residents redefine the words grace and hospitality. In the morning, fresh Ojai Valley orange juice, served in unassuming white Dixie cups, is available to all takers. In the afternoon, a simple sign is placed outside a hospitality tent set up on a grassy lawn—Please be our guest for tea from 1:00 to 4:00. Organizers and volunteers wear badges of the “Hi, My Name Is” variety, with county fair-type ribbons descending below. And there is no question to which they won’t fully invest in providing an answer.”*

**(On his observations of The Ojai’s competitive history)**

*“While The Ojai has studiously avoided becoming an anachronism, it definitely memorializes its past—and in so doing puts its grass-roots charm on full display. The names of each of the 85 players who have competed in The Ojai and gone on to win one or more Grand Slam events appear on a modestly erected wall of fame. You may recognize some of them: Pete Sampras, Billie Jean King, Lindsay Davenport, Arthur Ashe, and local products Bob and Mike Bryan—the twin brothers who currently dominate men’s doubles worldwide. The shady path that wound from the front gate to the Libbey Park courts was lined with triangular stand-up displays, onto which were affixed pictures of both the winner and runner-up of every competition conducted each year since...well, I don’t know exactly how far back they went. But as I browsed the collection*

during a break in tournament action, it struck me that I was literally walking through a home-Polaroid version of tennis history.

*“This stuff is priceless, and each year a group of volunteers is entrusted with meticulously posting the pictures in just the right spots on the three-sided displays, only to take them down a few days later to be carefully filed away. The history of The Ojai is a public trust, passed down through generations of volunteers—as is the tournament itself ... While The Ojai as a cultural phenomenon long ago set the standard for consistency and stability among “build it and they will come” events (predating Field of Dreams by a mere 94 years), it now stands in loving testament to a time long past.”*

**(Closing thoughts)**

*“The dynamism of sports communities had bewildered me. Actually, let me clarify that. It was my previous cluelessness about their vitality that bewildered me. I was astounded at how long their pivotal role in sports had escaped me—and how in hindsight, how self-evident it all was. But bam—there it was again. The two-by-four between the eyes. All the really, really good stuff about sports communities had been there all along, seemingly just waiting for me to notice. Notice taken.”*