

Ojai Profile on Legendary Coach Dick Gould

When Ojai Tennis Tournament organizers were kicking around names and ideas of who they wanted to honor at this year's Thursday night Welcome Reception BBQ, names of past Ojai greats like Jimmy Connors, Michael Chang, and Lindsay Davenport were brought up.

But just like last year's honoree Tracy Austin, the committee wanted someone who had a true affinity for the tournament – someone who for years and years had a connection to the event. Mark Weil was the first to contact Stanford University coaching legend Dick Gould who happily agreed to be Ojai's honored guest for the 114th annual event.

The Ventura native Gould has been associated with The Ojai for more than 50 years, as a player, coach and later a broadcaster for Fox Sports Network.

He first entered the tournament as a student at Ventura Junior High from 1950-52 and then represented Ventura High from 1953-55.

As a player for Stanford, Gould said two of his biggest losses came at The Ojai, "and on the same freaking court."

As a junior, Gould led USC All-American Ed Atkinson 5-3, 40-love in the third and deciding set, only to "choke it away." A year later, Gould was a service point away from victory against UCLA No. 1 Norman Perry, leading 5-2, 40-15 in the third. But once again, Gould couldn't close the door.

"I played No. 6 my first year and No. 3 my senior year and I was behind those guys. I never played year-round because I was working during the summer teaching tennis and swimming for the Rec Department. Those guys played year-round. I was just about the point where I had caught up to them."

The losses taught Gould a valuable lesson to never look too far ahead. "I started thinking one more point then this happens and that happens. It doesn't work that way," he said.

Gould says he doesn't regret holding his star player John McEnroe out of Ojai the one year he spent playing for Stanford in 1978. The summer before, McEnroe made the semifinals at Wimbledon. "He was here one year and he had a chance to play the Alan King Classic in Las Vegas," Gould said. "I would have been crazy to not let him do it. Personally I was sorry he wasn't there."

Gould said he would rather see the Pac-12 men's conference play an individual format, instead of the current team format. "It was always a great time of year to back off and it's really the last competition until the NCAAs so it would give someone depending on their position a chance to knock off a player they might not normally get to play," Gould explained. "It might help them get into the NCAA tournament with that win. I felt it was a great change of pace at a great time of year.

"I love the individual tournament and I think it's great for the players, but the team format is also very exciting, especially for the fans."

While he wasn't able to bring McEnroe along, Gould treasured the days when players like Scott Humphries, Paul Goldstein and Ryan Wolters would arrive in Ojai for the first time. "We get in the car and we have a five and a half hour drive and then it gets dark and we're in the middle of nowhere," Gould said. "Then we get to the courts in the morning and there's a lot of people around and everyone's busy and getting their orange juice and they really start getting into it."

And then there are the SoCal kids like the Bryan twins, Ryan Thacher and Bradley Klahn who would reminisce with their coach about their glory days playing the juniors at Ojai. "That's the beauty of Ojai," Gould said. "It's the one tournament where you have juniors, college and even out of college. It's just a wonderful mix and you don't see that at any other tournament."