

By Steve Pratt

Fifty years ago this month, Stan Smith came to Ojai as a shy, 18-year-old USC freshman from Pasadena, the reigning national junior champion, and playing on one of tennis' grandest stages, the final of the Men's Open Division at the 66th annual Ojai Tennis Tournament.

In a probably otherwise forgettable final for Smith, he was beaten by UCLA junior Charlie Pasarell, 6-3, 6-1, on that day in 1965 in just 38 minutes with Pasarell's passing shots no match for the net-charging Smith. In the doubles final later in the day, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Smith and Bob Lutz teamed up to exact some revenge against Pasarell and his UCLA teammate Joaquin Loyo-Mayo, winning the match, 2-6, 9-7, 8-6 in a division that debuted at The Ojai in the year 1900.

It will be hard for Smith not to get nostalgic during the playing of the 115th edition of the venerable tournament known as one of the most storied anywhere within tennis circles. Smith is returning to The Ojai in April for the first time since he began his long and storied career all those years ago as the tournament's honored guest in 2015.

Smith will be the featured speaker at the Thursday night barbecue, as well as mingle with Ojai tennis fans at a special fundraising wine event hosted by the Ojai Vineyard Tasting Room on Friday night.

A good friend of Weil Academy's Mark Weil, Smith's daughter once attended the Weil Academy and he paid a visit to Ojai while she was there a little over a decade ago.

"I walked through Libbey Park and it had changed a lot since I was there last," said Smith, now 68 years old and a resident of Hilton Head Island, S.C., where he runs his own junior tennis academy. "It brought back some memories, for sure. I played there a lot of times. It was always the highlight to play in that tournament."

Smith's time at The Ojai was indeed the Golden Age, bordering right on the advent of Open tennis and just a few years before the big boom of tennis in America during the 1970s. Players like Arthur Ashe and Billie Jean King shared the same courts as Smith, who played Ojai events from 1963 to 1968.

Smith first played at The Ojai as a 16-year-old junior in 1963, and he recalls losing a close match to a decorated junior named Jim Hobson. "That was my first year in the 18s and I remember it being closer than people expected it to be," Smith said. "It was like Wimbledon for me. I remember playing the match at a private court, which was a new thing for me."

He added: "Dodger Stadium had opened the year before and I remember we got up around 6 or 7 in the morning and we went to see the stadium. It's funny how certain events like that stay in your memory. Like the old orange juice stand."

The next year 1964, Smith used his first Ojai experience to win the high school division beating Tom Karp of University High and etching his name in the classic Ojai Record of Events book, the first of nine times it would appear as a champion or finalist during his career.

The following year came the singles finals loss to Pasarell and the doubles win as a freshman at USC.

He beat USC teammate Tom Edlefsen in the collegiate singles final in 1966, and the two paired up to win the doubles that year.

In 1967 and 1968 he beat teammate and doubles partner Bob Lutz in the Ojai collegiate singles final with the pair winning the doubles in 1967, but losing in the final in 1968, the last year he would play at The Ojai. Smith captured the NCAA singles title in 1968, and won the national doubles with Lutz in both 1967 and 1968.

"The Ojai certainly was the biggest tournament in the country at the time," Smith said. "It was a big deal. I remember playing a match at like 5:45 or 6 o'clock in the morning. Something crazy like that. Because they had to start so early to get all the matches in."

Smith went on to one of the most successful pro careers seen in recent time, achieving the world's No. 1 ranking, leading the United States to a Davis Cup title, and capturing the Wimbledon singles championship in 1972 by beating Ilie Năstase in five sets, after losing to John Newcombe in five sets the year before.

The Adidas Stan Smith shoe has seen a resurgence, and was re-launched last year, which has kept Smith busy with trips to Athens, Paris, London and New York to promote the shoe. Footwear News Magazine named it the Shoe of the Year in 2014.

Smith was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1987 and is currently the President of the Hall of Fame. He also runs Stan Smith Events, a company that helps corporations plan events and entertain their clients at the four Grand Slams, various golf events and the Olympics.

He still keeps in contact with his good friend Lutz of San Clemente, Calif., and the two were still playing Wimbledon senior events up until 10 years ago. During The Ojai in 2015, the two will surely raise a glass of orange juice or two, or perhaps some tea and toast their fine careers. They should sit back and enjoy everything about The Ojai this year. They've earned it.

Stan Smith's finals record at The Ojai:

1964 Boys' Interscholastic Singles:

Stan Smith (Pasadena) def. Tom Karp (University)

1965 Men's Open Singles

Charles Pasarell def. **Stan Smith**

1965 Men's Open Doubles

Stan Smith-Bob Lutz def. Charles Pasarell-Joaquin Loyo-Mayo

1966 Collegiate Singles

Stan Smith (USC) def. Tom Edlefsen (USC)

1966 Collegiate Doubles

Tom Edlefsen-**Stan Smith** (USC) def. Jerry Cromwell- Joaquin Loyo-Mayo (USC)

1967 Collegiate Singles

1967-**Stan Smith** (USC) def. Bob Lutz (USC)

1967 Collegiate Doubles

Stan Smith-Bob Lutz (USC) def. Joaquin Loyo-Mayo-Jim Hobson (USC)

1968 Collegiate Singles

Stan Smith (USC) def. Bob Lutz (USC)

1968 Collegiate Doubles

Steve Tidball-Roy Barth (UCLA) def. **Stan Smith**-Bob Lutz (USC)