

LEARNING FROM A LEGEND

Fernandez provides local tennis players with doubles pointers. [Page 53](#)



In this Aug. 28, 1995, photo, Gigi Fernandez reacts after her win against Irina Spirlea at the U.S. Open.

KATHY WILLENS/AP

Fernandez shares insights with local tennis fans

By STEVE SADIN

Pioneer Press

Doubles tennis is as much a mental game as a physical one and a group of women learned that recently from one the best — Gigi Fernandez.

Fernandez gave a clinic to more than 30 adult women tennis players on March 2 at the Glenview Tennis Club, offering tips on how to improve strategy and become more successful.

A member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Fernandez won 71 championships on the WTA tour, including 17 Grand Slam doubles titles. In 1992, she won the French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open doubles crowns along with the Olympic gold medal in doubles. She started 1993 with the Australian Open doubles crown.

“That’s a golden slam,” Fernandez said of winning the four grand slam tournaments as well as an Olympic gold medal.

She won the Olympics with Mary Joe Fernandez (no relation) and 14 of her Grand Slam titles with Natasha Zvereva.

Fernandez said the four elements of winning doubles are positioning, execution, shot selection and tactics. She said people can improve their doubles game without becoming better physical players.

“You can improve your doubles performance without improving your game,” Fernandez said. “If you’re underperforming, you go with high-percentage shots. Doubles is a team game. In doubles the team wins.”

Mary Hershey of Northfield was echoing Fernandez’s messages after the clinic. She said she liked the way Fernandez was able to communicate equally well to all levels of tennis players.

“She talked about coverage of high percentage shots,” Hershey said. “She told us how to stagger coverage on the court.”

Lexy Wistenberg of



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Natasha Zvereva, left, and Gigi Fernandez celebrate after winning the women’s doubles final at the U.S. Open on Sept. 8, 1996, in New York.

Glenview, another participant at the clinic, was happy with the advice she received. She said she plays three times a week with the same partner and they were leaving the clinic with more tools than they had before.

“It’s pretty exciting to learn from the best,” Wistenberg said. “She helped us learn how to set up with your partner. She helped us realize that you can get better with smart strategy.”

During a talk and question-and-answer session over lunch when the on-court time was complete, Fernandez stressed communication between partners. She said it was important to her success.

“You should communicate between every point. It may be a nod or a glance but you should recognize your partner,” Fernandez said.

“Use signals,” she added as she turned her back to

the group and held two fingers behind her.

By the time the clinic was over, participants like Kathy Grady of Glenview were already describing the game the way Fernandez teaches it. Grady said she plays four times a week, strictly doubles.

“A lot of it is mental,” Grady said. “She gave us drills to help us move around the court. She told us to never give up.”

Teaching and coaching is relatively new for Fernandez. She retired from competitive tennis in 1997.

In 2012, she got an offer from Chelsea Piers to run the organization’s efforts in Connecticut, where she now resides. It fit with motherhood.

“They literally share a driveway with my children’s school,” said Fernandez, the mother of 7-year-old twins. “They have a day

care there. When they were younger I took them with me. Now I drop them at school and pick them up.”

Along with duties at Chelsea Piers, Fernandez said she coaches a high school team and does clinics like the one in Glenview several times a month.

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