



By Jim Knowles

San Leandro Times

The 1950 national champion tennis player Art “Tappy” Larsen, who grew up and lived most of his life in San Leandro, died on Dec. 7.

Larsen won the United States National Championship in 1950 at Forest Hills. He won the U.S. Clay Courts and U.S. Hard Courts in 1952, and the U.S. Indoors in 1953, making him the first man to win a national championship of four surfaces, despite having his tennis career delayed when he was in the army. Tony Trabert is the only other player to accomplish the feat.

Larsen was one of the sport’s most colorful characters, due to his quirky sense of humor and his habit of tapping things, such as the top of the net. He told the San Leandro Times once in an interview that his tapping habit came from combat in Europe World War II.

According to a press release from the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Larsen was in heavy combat and received four Bronze Stars. He later focused on tennis as a form of therapy after he returned from the war.

Larsen was on the United States Davis Cup team in 1951 and 1952 and helped the team advance to the finals both years.

Tappy Larsen played against tennis stars Don Budge, Pancho Gonzalez, Tony Trabert and Jack Kramer, and was a doubles partner of Ken Rosewall.

“Art was a wonderful tennis player who had great finesse in his game,” said Hall of Famer Tony Trabert, in a statement from the International Tennis Hall of Fame. “He had a unique personality, and he was a good friend and I will miss him.”

Larsen said he had hundreds of shots. One time, in a doubles match at the French Championships (now the French Open) Larson wound up to put away a lob for match point. He growled, about to slam the ball for a winner, and at the last second he turned around his racket and tapped the ball with the handle end, like a pool cue, to make a tiny drop-shot just over the net for the win.

His competitive career ended when he was hit by a car on his motor scooter as he was exiting the Nimitz Freeway onto Davis Street. But Larsen continued to teach tennis for most of his life.

Larsen attended the University of San Francisco, where he was a member of the 1949 NCAA Men's Tennis Championship team.

Larsen is survived by his companion of more than 30 years, Aline Mestas. He also leaves a sister, Joyce A. Stengel, nephews Willis C. Stengel and Carl A. Stengel, niece Patricia Rickner and their families; all of whom fondly remember enjoying tennis lessons and matches with their uncle.

CAPTION: Tappy Larsen won the U.S. championships in 1950 and was the national champion of four different surfaces.

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National Champion Tennis Player Tappy Larsen Dies

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