

Award Bios

Adaptive & Wheelchair Award-The Adaptive and/or Wheelchair Award is presented to a player, tournament, or program that has made an outstanding contribution during the year, whether by on-court ability, sportsmanship, community service, or promotion of the sport.

Recipient: Tennis 4 Fun Program founded by Lori Duke (Hattiesburg, MS)

Originally from New Orleans, Lori moved to Hattiesburg eighteen (18) years ago. Lori is married to her husband, Randy. They have an adult son Perrin, who lives in Petal, MS with his wife Sarah. Lori played tennis as a young girl but did not start playing again until 2014. She plays league tennis and is a member of the Racquet Club of Hattiesburg. Upon her recent retirement, Lori started Tennis for Fun in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Tennis for Fun is open to special needs people of all ages. The program is free, run entirely by volunteers and provides athletes an opportunity to have fun playing tennis in order to learn basic skills and socialize with each other. Tennis for Fun has been one of the most rewarding experiences in Lori's life. She sees the absolute joy and enthusiasm in the athletes' faces when they are on the courts practicing and competing in tennis.

Adult LLC of the Year- This award is presented to a local league coordinator in recognition outstanding coordination and promotion of league play on the local level

Recipient: Graham Bucciantini (Jackson)

Graham has been the LLC for all USTA League programs in Jackson since 2015. He is a lifelong Jackson area resident and has been an avid tennis player for most of his life. He currently resides in Flowood, MS. He is a graduate of Mississippi State University, and in addition to being the Jackson LLC, he is also an outside sales rep for Under Armour in their Golf Division. He is very passionate about league tennis and is always thinking outside the box to grow it as much as possible. He created one of the most popular social leagues in the state called EKOLU, which is played in the fall alongside Team Singles. He is very flattered to be the adult coordinator in Jackson as it has produced numerous national champions and runners-up over the last several years. He's always open to suggestions on how to make league tennis more enjoyable and inclusive for everyone from beginners to higher-level players. He strongly believes that Lindsey Brashier, the state league coordinator, has put together one of the greatest teams of LLCs in the Southern section and thoroughly enjoys working with each and every one of them. .

Adult tournament of the Year-Presented to an adult tournament in recognition of excellence in the organization of a sanctioned tournament and/or event

Recipient: Southern Men's Clay Court Championship (Dave Randall, River Hills Club)

Commonly referred to as the Southern Seniors tennis tournament, this event is held annually at the prestigious River Hills Club in Jackson and has been a premier event in Mississippi's tennis calendar for an impressive 59 years. Known for attracting high-level players from across the nation, the tournament consistently delivers a showcase of exceptional talent and competitive play. Its reputation for excellence stems from its first-class facilities and the dedication of River Hills Club to fostering a top-tier tennis experience. Over the decades, the Southern Seniors has become a hallmark of elite tennis, drawing some of the best adult players to compete on its courts. This award highlights the tournament's impact on the tennis community and its role in maintaining the highest standards of competition. The Southern Seniors stands as a testament to the passion and commitment of Mississippi's tennis enthusiasts, providing a stage for athletes to compete at their best while continuing a legacy of excellence that has defined the event for nearly six decades.

Captain of the Year This award is presented to a captain who has been a captain for more than two years, displays a high level of sportsmanship, and has earned the respect of their peers.

Recipient: Rhonda Rayborn (Brookhaven)

To know Rhonda Rayborn you have to know her family. Rhonda and Mitch have a son Jerrod who is married to his wife Carrie. They have a daughter, Sara Mitchell. Everyone, even 4 year old Sara Mitchell, plays tennis. Rhonda has served on committees and boards for tennis all her married life. As a player she is tennis pro's dream, owning 67 tennis skirts! As a tennis wife Rhonda has watched tennis matches in all of the southern states! She can load an entire dish washer with Mitch and Jerrod's championship drink ware. She has listened as 4.5 rating appeals have been written at her supper table. Three days later she watched as her husband Mitch opened a letter congratulating him on being named Mississippi's 4.5 player of the year (so much for his appeal efforts that year). She has witnessed same husband get carpal tunnel symptoms from pressing the appeal button. Only child Jerrod got his national ranking as a 14 year old. Jerrod played competitively from age 9 through college and came out into adult tennis also as a 4.5. From Junior Davis cup to being selected to Team Mississippi each year in every age group, Jerrod was the #1 ranked 18 year old, and winner of the MTA college scholarship. Jerrod met his wife Carrie on the tennis court. Their daughter Sara Mitchell is already taking lessons from Ray Sahag. You wait and come watch Sara Mitchell play. Rhonda has captained 43 teams to 31 state tournaments. She played her first JLTA match in 1986. She is currently a captain in the Platinum league team, Lilies of the Volley. This award came from the 2024 Southwest local league champion team in the 55 division. As captain, Rayborn lives by the belief that her teammates need to win inside the lines and leave all battles outside the lines for her to fight. Tennis has been good to the Rayborns. They all believe Tennis players make the best friends.

Coach of the Year-Presented to an outstanding high school or college coach in recognition of leadership and inspiration in the development of a winning program

Recipient: Matt Roberts (Mississippi State Men's Coach)

Matt Roberts has coached tennis at Mississippi State for 13 seasons. He is in his 11th season as head coach. Roberts is currently the Bulldogs' longest-tenured head coach on campus and has the second-highest winning percentage in program history. Roberts has guided MSU to the NCAA Championships every year of his tenure save for the covid-shortened 2020 campaign and claimed back-to-back SEC Tournament titles in 2018 and 2019. He was named the SEC Coach of the Year in 2018 and is a four-time ITA Southern Regional Coach of the Year. During Roberts' tenure in Starkville, the Bulldogs have reached the Round of 16 at the NCAA Championships six times – including five of the last six seasons. His team reached the NCAA quarterfinals in 2018 headlined by Nuno Borges, who is currently the No. 36 player in the world. He has coached nine All-Americans that have won 15 All-America honors.

Community Tennis Association of the Year-Presented to a Community Tennis Association in recognition of outstanding service in the administration of local tennis programs and the promotion of tennis at the community level

Recipient: Northeast MS CTA (Becky Nelms, President)

This CTA is an Umbrella CTA that covers 9 counties in Northeast Mississippi and has been operating for 12 years. Lead by president, Becky Nelms the CTA provides low-cost beginner lessons to adults and juniors in rural areas that do not normally have access to tennis pros or organized tennis lessons, programs, or events. The CTA likes to be able to give people in these areas opportunities to try tennis close to their home so they don't have to drive into larger cities. The CTA donates revenue received from their annual USTA grant and their JTT entry fees back to area high school tennis booster programs in the form of a CTA grant. Their two Community Coordinators, Mark Robbins and Jacob Stanley, have helped to run more programs, get more teams, plan more events, and get more people involved in tennis.

Dorothy Vest Player of the Year Female and Male-Presented to outstanding junior players ranked in the 18 divisions in recognition of their individual tennis performance at the state, sectional and national levels and their representation of Mississippi in team events including the Southern Ozaki Junior Cup.

Female Recipient: Julia Fair Gaines (Tupelo)

For the past eleven years, Julia Fair has participated in every level of competition that the USTA offers from junior team tennis, high school tennis, state, sectional and national tournaments. She has competed in USTA tournaments since she was seven years old. She's made it to the finals of the Mississippi State Closed Championship in every age division winning the singles twice and doubles three times. She finished third this past year. She has competed in tournaments at the southern and national levels having the opportunity to travel all over the country. She has represented Mississippi in the Southern Ozaki Junior Cup five times battling against the best players in the south. She has played on three different junior team tennis teams and helped her teams win state and compete at sectionals. She also has enjoyed playing for her high school teams reaching the 1-2A state championship twice with Tupelo Christian Prep and the 7A state championship with Tupelo High School. She has won two individual state titles in girls' doubles and was the finalist in girls' singles. She is looking forward to one last season with the Golden Wave. She plays with integrity and as a result has made many lifelong friends on the court. She loves the sport and wants to continue to have fun every time she steps on the court. She plans on attending the University of Mississippi in the fall with hopes to continue her love of tennis by competing as a member of the school's club tennis team. Julia Fair has a true passion for the game and wants to be able to play tennis her entire life - hopefully well into her 80's!

Male Recipient: Lucas Wrigley (Ocean Springs)

Lucas Wrigley, a senior at Ocean Springs High School and son of Randy and Robbie Wrigley, has been passionate about tennis since picking up his first racquet at the age of 4. His competitive journey began at 6, participating in his first Mississippi Red Ball Qualifier. Since then, Lucas has competed extensively across the nation, resulting in Mississippi's top-ranked player in the Boys' 10s, 12s, 14s, 16s, and 18s categories. He also competed in the national hard and clay court championships. Lucas has proudly represented Mississippi in the Southern Ozaki Junior Cup five times and has been a vital part of the Ocean Springs High School varsity tennis team since seventh grade. His accolades include singles district champion, two time doubles champion, and mixed doubles champion, as well as the MSHAA Mixed Doubles Championship title. As a scholar, he maintains a 4.7 GPA and is an active member of the National Honor Society, Beta Club, Youth Activation Committee, and Mayor's Youth Council. He also served as Junior Civitan Treasurer during his junior and senior years. Lucas is a three year captain of the Ocean Springs High School tennis team. In his spare time Lucas enjoys fishing the offshore waters around the Mississippi Barrier Islands. Lucas received the George Wilkerson Memorial Award in his junior year and is honored to accept the Dorothy Vest Male Player of the Year Award. This fall, Lucas will continue his academic and athletic journey at The University of the South, Sewanee, where he will compete on the collegiate tennis team. Thank you to his coaches, Michael Ricks and Steve Pennington, for their unwavering support in developing his game, and to Andres Yopez, Karem Graeber, the Mississippi Tennis Association, and the tennis community, families and friends for their encouragement and kindness.

Educational Merit Award-Presented to an organization or individual that has developed an outstanding tennis program that provides leadership opportunities, inspiration, mentoring, or educational opportunities in junior tennis programs for local area youth

Greenville NJTL Founder and President Birlette Jelks (Greenville, MS)

Birlette Jelks has played tennis since he was eighteen years old, and has coached tennis and managed the Greenville CTA/NJTL program for over thirty years. He has taken youth all over the South to NJTL rallies, and has helped send more than forty scholars to college on tennis or related scholarships. Jelks is committed to building youth programs under the USTA and helping kids learn to play and love the game of tennis, a game that they can play their entire lives. He is a tennis teaching professional and has attended numerous seminars and USTA Camps. Through tennis, Jelks not only teaches the game, he also teaches friendship, humility, sportsmanship, and camaraderie. He encourages his NJTL members to make good grades in school and to stick things out. Birlette Jelks has spent many hours dedicating his life to the game of tennis and to kids in his community through his NJTL programs and has continued the legacy that was started many years ago through other heroes like Charlie Pasarell and Arthur Ashe.

George Wilkerson Award Female and Male Presented to outstanding junior players who exemplify the qualities of composure under physical stress and emotional discipline in recognition of their desire, integrity, perseverance, maturity, character (on and off the court), conduct and appearance

Female Recipient: Kennedy Hutto (Madison)

Kennedy Hutto is a junior and attends Madison Central High School. She is the daughter of Jeremy and Natalie Hutto. Kennedy began taking tennis lessons at five years old, and started playing USTA tournaments at eight years old. She has been a starter on the Madison Central High School varsity team since the 7th grade and has served as a team captain for the past two years. During her time on the tennis team, Madison Central has won four straight state championships. Kennedy is the 2024 7A state singles champion, and was a finalist in the 2022 and 2023 6A mixed doubles state championship. She was selected to the 6A Coaches All State Team in 2022 and 2023, and the 7A Coaches All State Team in 2024. Kennedy was named Most Valuable Player for the Madison Central tennis team in 2023 and 2024. She has also won the 2023 MS Closed 16s singles championship. Kennedy has competed in the National Clay-Court Championships, National Hard-Court Championships and has represented Mississippi in the Southern Ozaki Junior Cup for the past four years. Outside of tennis, Kennedy is a member of the Madison Junior Civitan Club, Junior Auxiliary of Madison County Crown Club, Mayor's Youth Council, National Beta Club, FCA leadership team, and is a Jackson Symphony League Sub Deb Ambassador.

During her playing career, Kennedy has received instruction from many excellent USTA coaches including Robert Russell, Trey Woods, Andres Yopez, and Jefferson Nino. Kennedy is honored to be the recipient of the George Wilkerson Memorial Award.

George Wilkerson Award Male

Michael Taylor Parker (Madison)

Taylor Parker is a senior who attends Madison Central High School. He has been a part of the varsity tennis team for Madison Central for 5 years and is currently the reigning singles 7A champion along with defending state champion. He thanks Andres Yopez along with Walker and Ray Sahag for their support and dedication for helping him grow not only as a player but as a person. He also thanks his aunt Yvette Cook for getting him started in tennis. Taylor plans to continue his athletic and academic career at Delta State University next fall.

Powers Moore Junior Sportsmanship Award-Presented to an outstanding junior player (boy or girl) ranked in the state in recognition of his or her sportsmanship and outstanding character shown.

Recipient: Josie Tullos (Newton)

Josie Tullos is from Newton, MS and was a 2024 Newton County High School graduate. She now plays for the Jones County Junior College women's tennis team. Josie played on the varsity tennis team at Newton County for 6 years. While at Newton County, she was the 4A Girls Doubles State Champion in 2023 and 2024. In 2023, Josie was the East Central Mississippi Fellowship of Christian Athletes Female Athlete of the Year. Josie was a student leader for FCA at Newton County and is now on the FCA leadership team at Jones College. Josie has been playing USTA tournaments since junior high and played in the Southern 18s Level 3 Closed Championship in 2023 and 2024. She is currently playing USTA adult league and recently won the 2024 Women's 8.5 Combo Sectional Championship with her Jackson team.

Jr Team Tennis Coordinator of the Year-Presented to a junior local league coordinator that shows program growth, outstanding organizational skills and implements new and innovative ideas

Recipient: Mark Robbins (Northeast Mississippi)

Mark started playing tennis at 13 years old through Junior Team Tennis. During his teenage years he played USTA Tournaments, JTT, and played on the New Albany High School tennis team. Robbins played 2 years at Itawamba Community College and one year at Blue Mountain College. He captained his first JTT team as a 17 year old player. As soon as he turned 18, he earned his certification to be a USTA official. The following year he was hired by MTA to be the JTT local coordinator and the community coordinator for Northeast MS. He is in year 11 as an official, year 10 as a coordinator, and starting his 4th term on the MTA board of directors. He thanks the players and captains who participate in his JTT leagues and the Northeast CTA and MTA that support his work. Most of all he owes a big thank you to his wife Stephanie and son James.

Jr Team Tennis Sportsmanship Award-Presented to a boy or girl player who played on a USTA Junior Team Tennis team in Mississippi in recognition of his or her good sportsmanship and was nominated by opponents and opposing captains

Recipient: Evelyn Ulmer (Madison)

Evelyn Ulmer is the daughter of Joe and Sarah Ulmer from Madison, Mississippi. She is twelve years old and in the sixth grade at Madison-Ridgeland Academy. Evelyn's initial interest in tennis grew from enjoying time on the courts playing with her parents. At age eight, she began taking tennis lessons and started playing team tennis soon after. Evelyn has enjoyed playing on several different USTA teams and has had the opportunity to play in the JTT state tennis tournament on several occasions. While Evelyn greatly enjoys the challenge and competition of tennis, she most loves making new friends, being active, and having fun.

Junior Tournament of the Year-Presented to a junior tournament in recognition of excellence in the organization and conduct of a sanctioned event

Recipient: Snowden Grove Jr Spring Classic (Michael Johnson, Southaven Tennis Center)

Michael Johnson is the Director of Tennis for the City of Southaven, and has been an RSPA Elite Tennis Professional for nearly 40 years. He enjoys building programs from the ground up, from beginners to advanced players of all ages. Southaven Tennis Center's programs currently have over 150 kids, and more than 20 USTA adult league teams from the 2.5-4.0 levels. City of Southaven is currently building 8 additional hard courts to make a 20 court facility in order to accommodate the amount of local play in the area. They will be hosting two pro events in August 2025, both a men's and women's \$25,000 futures.

Jim Warren Volunteer of the Year Award-Presented to a volunteer in recognition of outstanding service at the local, state, sectional and or national levels The winner of the volunteer award at the state level is also recognized today with a Volunteer Service Award from the USTA Southern Section.

Recipient: Robbie Wrigley (Ocean Springs)

Robbie Wrigley, a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, is passionate about promoting tennis and serving her community. Married to Randy Wrigley and mom to Jaklyn, Nikki, and Lucas, Robbie is the Tennis Chair at Treasure Oak Country Club in Ocean Springs. An active USTA player and long-time captain of her 3.5 teams, she also volunteers as a non-playing captain for multiple teams each season. Robbie has served on the Mississippi Tennis Association Awards Committee, worked as a USTA-certified umpire, and has been instrumental in hosting junior and adult USTA tournaments. She has also been active with JTT as a captain and coordinator at TOCC. She also co-founded and continues to serve on the Ocean Springs Athletic Foundation and is active with the PTO. Committed to growing the game for players of all ages, Robbie is honored to be named the Mississippi Tennis Association Volunteer of the Year.

Member Organization of the Year-Presented to a top tier tennis facility in Mississippi in recognition of outstanding service to the local community, to the organization's members, and to the game of tennis

Recipient: Canebrake Country Club Tennis Facility (Teddy Viator, Hattiesburg, Director of Tennis)

Canebrake Country Club's Tennis Facility opened late 2023 and was built by local businessman Dr. Bennett York with the assistance of his daughter, Paige York. The facility boasts 8 hard courts and 4 clay courts with state of the art lighting. In addition the facility has an outstanding outdoor pavilion with seating, food and beverage service, as well as televisions and a well stocked pro-shop. In 2024 Canebrake Tennis hosted 6 USTA Junior tournaments and one Adult tournament. The facility also hosted high school tennis matches, Junior and Adult clinics, Adult League matches, Cardio Tennis, and collegiate tennis matches. In 2024 Canebrake had over 20,000 players use the facility in programs such as Wimbledon Wood and Whites and My Shrimp and I (parent-child event). In September 2024 Canebrake Tennis won the National Award for Outstanding New Facility of the Year and was presented the award at the US Open. Tennis Staff includes: Teddy Viator, Director; Jonathan Shemper, Head Pro; and Ricky Hernandez, Assistant Tennis pro and Head Pickleball Pro.

Official of the Year-Presented to a certified official in recognition of outstanding contributions to the cause of tennis officiating in Mississippi

Recipient: Sonia Kusek (Hernando)

Sonia Kusek has been one of the staple officials in North Mississippi for years. She officiates all levels of junior tournaments, ITA matches and tournaments, as well as adult tournaments. She is one of the most passionate officials in the state, always working with others to help whenever needed, whether it is a tournament she is helping with or not. She routinely helps other officials at tournaments she isn't working. Her ability to reach out and help others is always there, and this is all on top of her being a great official on court and during tournaments. Her work at tournaments in MS is professional, understanding of nuanced situations, and knowing when and when not to insert herself into a situation.

Pro of the Year-Presented to a certified tennis professional in recognition of quality programming for adults and or youth

Laperiall Jones (Jackson)

LaPeriall Jones, also known as LP, is a lifelong enthusiast and advocate for tennis who has dedicated over three decades to advancing the sport in Mississippi. Her journey with tennis began in middle school, where she quickly developed a passion for the game that carried her to her high school tennis team and later to Jackson State University, where she competed on the collegiate tennis team. This rich playing experience laid the foundation for her transition to adult tennis leagues in 2001, where she continues to inspire others with her love for the game. As the Executive Director of Ace 2 Deuce NJTL and CTA and as the Facility Director of the Dorothy Vest Tennis Center at Battlefield Park, LaPeriall has worked tirelessly to grow tennis at the grassroots level. Since 2021, she has been coaching junior tennis teams and serving as a mentor and leader in her community. Under her leadership, Ace 2 Deuce has flourished, fostering junior teams that consistently qualify for state championships and creating opportunities for underprivileged youth to experience the sport. She has been instrumental in building partnerships with local schools and developing mentorship, after-school, and weekend programs that inspire community involvement and highlight the transformative power of tennis. LaPeriall's ultimate vision is to establish a sustainable tennis facility in an under-resourced area, providing youth and adults alike with opportunities for personal and professional growth through the sport. Her unwavering dedication, from her days as a student-athlete to her current roles as a coach and community leader, exemplifies her lifelong passion for tennis. These contributions make her a truly deserving recipient of the 2024 Tennis Professional of the Year Award Winner!

Family of the Year-Presented to a family in recognition of outstanding contributions in the promotion of tennis in Mississippi, from playing, coaching, captaining, or providing the sport in the community

Recipient: Bo and Suzy Bowman Family (New Albany)

For nearly 25 years, tennis has been a vital part of the Bowman Family's life. Bo Bowman is a veteran teaching professional at BNA Tennis Park in New Albany, MS where he runs Bowman's Tennis Shop and Bowman's Tennis Academy, where he teaches all ages in an after-school program. Suzy has been playing tennis for 20 years and in the last decade coached the New Albany Bulldog Tennis team to 8 State Championship titles, where she won numerous state and sectional coaching honors during her tenure. Suzy is an avid league player and has played in back to back National USTA League Championships at mixed doubles. She coaches JTT league teams in her area and continues to promote the sport to get players involved at the beginner, high school, and adult levels. Their two sons Bradyn and Brace have both played tennis since they were 5 years old. Bradyn is now a junior at New Albany High School where he just won his 4th State Championship title, and plans to play Junior College tennis upon graduation. Brace is in the 6th grade. He plays Junior Team Tennis, USTA Tournaments, and just competed in the Southern Sectional JTT Championship in the Advanced 12s Division.

Special Tennis Event of the Year-Presented to a charitable or special tennis event, other than a sanctioned or state championship tournament, in recognition of exemplary promotion and support of tennis or providing a tennis event to benefit a cause.

Recipient: Memory Makers Tournament (Oxford, MS)

The first annual Memory Makers Tennis Tournament was held in 2017 and was led by the Oxford High School Students for Alzheimer's Club founder, Jack Ligon. Jack came up with the idea to host a tournament benefitting Memory Makers, a local respite care center for people suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia. Jack, along with fellow club members (made up mostly of OHS tennis players), hit the ground running and hosted a fun Saturday morning of tennis and a silent auction and raised around \$6,000 that first year. Since then, the tournament has grown in size and popularity and has become a much-anticipated annual event for the local community. The leadership of the event is passed on each year to a new group of Club officers and over time, a healthy dose of competition has motivated each new group of officers to work just a little harder than the group before them. In 2024, when Tal and Van Turner and Andrew Koestler were put in charge, they set out with one mission: to raise more money than their older brothers had raised in previous years. And that they did! Thanks to a very generous community, hard work, a good team of club members, and a good old fashioned competitive spirit, they were able to raise over \$30,000 this summer!

Team Tennis Event of the Year-Presented to a USTA Team Tennis event in recognition of exemplary promotion and support of tennis

Recipient: Tri-Level State Championship (Brookhaven CTA)

What began as a "wouldn't it be crazy if" conversation between three members of the Brookhaven Tennis Association ended in a 375-player tournament that transformed their small town into a tennis destination in September 2024. With a population of just over 12,000, Brookhaven had never hosted an adult USTA tournament of any size. With gorgeous private facilities and a Chamber of Commerce that caught the vision of the directors (Sarah Reynolds, Mary Helen Miller, and Rockie Netherland), a fingers crossed, last-minute bid was placed in late 2023. Nine months of fundraising, advertising, and countless coffee meetings later, the Tri Level State Tournament kicked off on September 13th. Downtown Brookhaven hosted an outdoor concert for the players that Friday evening, and a locally-owned daiquiri shop offered tennis-themed drinks throughout the weekend. Players enjoyed playing at three different facilities- Copiah Lincoln Community College, The Club at Ole Brook, and Brookhill on Natchez. With one tournament under their belts, the co-directors are excited about providing another great tournament experience in 2025. Brookhaven calls itself "The Homeseeker's Paradise", and it's becoming a "Tennis Player's Paradise" too.

League Team of the Year-This award is presented to a USTA League local team in any age division and any USTA League program who advanced to the state championship, in recognition of the team's tennis performance and sportsmanship during the tournament.

Recipient: Jen Otto 18&Over 4.0 Women's Team (Brandon)

Many athletes thrive on competition, and that shows each and every time the members of Team Otto walk on the court to play. Jen has captained this 18s-4.0 team since 2022. Each year they battle hard in the season to pull out the league victory. In 2022, they won the league with a 10-2 record; in 2023 they won the league again with a 9-1 record...in those years they just could not close out the State Tournament with a title. In 2024, the team members all hit the "over 40" mark, but they were still ready to compete and confident they could bring their best game each time they played. It was not an easy task, but they won the league with a record of 10-2. Team Otto then went on to win state without dropping a team match, marking their first time to win a state tournament.

About her team, Jen says: "The thing that stands out the most to me as captain of this team is not only the fact that all of us are over 40 (some even over 50), but that each player rises to the occasion. As the saying goes, "The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team." We all have a common goal to have fun and to bring it....we all know that pressure is a privilege."

Media Excellence Award-Presented to an individual or organization who/which disseminates information to the general public in recognition of their contributions to tennis in Mississippi and the sport in general.

Recipient: David Healy (Delta Democrat Times)

David Healy is the sports editor of the Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville. He has been the sports editor for six years. David grew up in Germantown, Tennessee and went to college at Auburn University. David enjoys covering all sports at the Delta Democrat-Times from little league to college. One of his favorite sports to cover is tennis including the great teaching done by USTA Mississippi coaches Birlette Jelks and S.B. Buck at Wards Recreation Center.

NJTL Arthur Ashe Essay Contest Award-Presented to an individual that is a part of a local NJTL Chapter, in recognition of writing an outstanding essay about a topic relevant to the contest's yearly theme.

Recipient: Baruni Jakkula (Greenville NJTL)

Baruni is a 10th-grade student from Greenville, Mississippi, with a passion for tennis and excellence both on and off the court. Over the past six years, she has developed her skills and earned the position of being of the varsity tennis team. During this time, she has competed in numerous state championships, and achieved victories in both singles and doubles matches. Additionally, as an NJTL/USTA player, she has worked to stand out by improving her game and encouraging others to develop a love for tennis. Outside tennis, she is actively involved in academics and extracurricular activities. Her love for science inspires her dream of becoming a cardiologist and attending an Ivy League university. Baruni is also passionate about helping her community and has participated in numerous initiatives, from environmental projects to educational workshops for children. These activities are part of her broader goal to make a positive impact in her community and beyond. She also loves to swim. She is honored to be selected as a 2024 Mississippi Tennis Award Winner and looks forward to celebrating this achievement alongside her fellow recipients.