

# Palm Beach Daily News

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## NEWS

# Former tennis champ entering USTA Midwest Hall of Fame

*Dorothy Kohl credits the sport with setting her life's course.*

**Linda Marx**

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Dorothy Watman Levine Kohl was 12 years old the first time she lifted a tennis racket.

It was a warm Chicago day in the summer of 1942, and she and three pals were looking for something to do. They gathered rackets and balls and made their way to a public park.

Although Kohl was athletic and played basketball, baseball, volleyball and table tennis, she didn't have a clue about tennis. One of four siblings, no one in her family played.

"It was during World War II, and I had never played tennis before, but after I watched others at the park in a nice rally, I knew I wanted to learn," says Kohl, who was born and raised in Chicago and now lives in Palm Beach with her husband Sidney. "Little did I know that tennis would set me on the course of my life."

After years of practice and perseverance, Kohl became one of the top U.S. female tennis players of the 1950s. She won the national indoor singles and doubles titles in 1954 and 1957. In 1954, she also played Wimbledon and the French Open during a three-month stay in Europe.

In 1953, she was ranked No. 1 in women's singles in the Chicago District Tennis Association and No. 11 in the U.S. Tennis Association, then called the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association.

In 1947 and 1948, Kohl won the USTA/Midwest Section junior singles championship. And in 1946, she was ranked No. 1 nationally.

She will be recognized Dec. 1 at the Westin Hotel in downtown Indianapolis when she is inducted into the 2012 USTA/Midwest Hall of Fame.

“As one of the top U.S. female tennis players in the 1950s, Dorothy is most deserving of this honor,” says Jonelle Smith, president of the USTA/Midwest Section.

Kohl is “thrilled” about the induction and has written an acceptance speech detailing her early struggles and love for the sport. As a lifelong competitive athlete committed to perfecting her game, this award means a lot.

“When I was struggling with tennis, I was lucky that I had competed in table tennis, which was good for eye and hand coordination, and jumping rope that made me fast on my feet and provided cardio,” she says. “I am so excited about being named to the Hall of Fame. It proves my self-motivation has paid off.”

Kohl remembers trekking to the tennis court every day after school during good weather in Chicago. At the time, there was no indoor facility, so in winter she played on handball courts, longing to be in California where she could play outside year-round.

“It was war time when things were rationed,” she recalls. “I couldn’t even buy tennis shoes, and the balls had no fuzz on them.”

But she made the best of her situation. Eventually, she met a strong player who told her she had the makings of a good player but advised changing her unorthodox swing.

In 1943, she booked a tennis lesson with a pro who changed her grip and taught her the proper forehand and backhand. “That summer, I really improved my game and began playing in local tournaments,” she says.

The next year, she entered the River Forest Tennis Open with kids from all over the country. But she lost in the first round, and felt terrible because the California girls played much better. Then, in 1945, Chicago got an indoor tennis facility, and Kohl was off and swinging. She did well on wood courts and also became a good indoor player.

“I was so committed and longed to be really good,” she says. “So when I played River Forest again, I defeated the girl 11-0 who had originally beat me!”

Kohl played tennis seven days a week, taking a street car to the courts and skipping college. She met her first husband on the tennis court. They had three daughters, Lori, Jana and Lisa.

After her husband died 14 years later, a tennis friend introduced her to Sidney Kohl.

They married in 1968, and she moved to Milwaukee, where he was president and chairman of the board of directors of his family business, Kohl's food and department stores. They sold the business four years later.

"Sydney had two sons from a previous marriage and adopted my daughters, so while we raised our kids in Milwaukee, I played tennis for fun," says Kohl.

In 1978, they moved to Palm Beach, where she could play tennis every day. Kohl maintained that pace until last year, when she decided to slow down and stick to fitness workouts with a trainer. She's also active with yoga, golf and bridge.

Sidney had co-founded Alliant and is now chairman of the board of directors of the Florida corporation.

Together, they have been collecting art since 1970. Eight pieces from their collection of abstract expressionist works, offered for sale Tuesday at Sotheby's, brought in \$101.3 million. Included were works by Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Hans Hofmann and Arshile Gorky.

The Kohls support many charities. This season, Kohl and one of her daughters will co-chair the MorseLife event to support the Morse Geriatric Center. And for his work, Sydney recently won a United Way award.

Says Kohl, "Since Palm Beach is our community, we like to give back."

And when she returns from her induction to the Hall of Fame, Kohl will again thank tennis for gifts with which she's been blessed.