

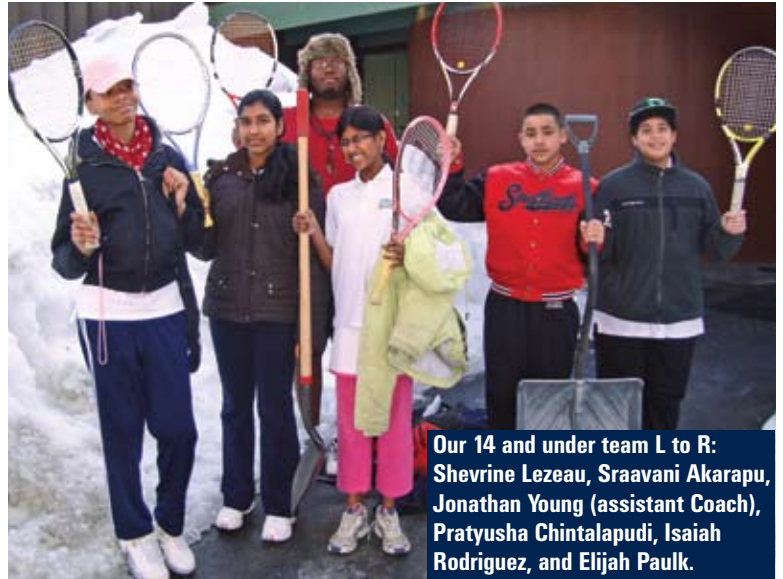
Traveling in Mid-Winter

NEITHER SNOW, NOR RAIN, NOR GLOOM OF NIGHT, stay our Norwalk Grassroots tennis players from their appointed matches all over the county!

Despite this snowiest of winters, NGT is fielding more traveling teams than ever, and providing more tournaments and more indoor court time—all so important for maintaining our players' focus on tennis and their curve of improvement.

Fifty-eight of our players are deployed in five USTA League teams; 8's, 10's, 12's, 14's, and 18's. The season runs from January through March and demands travel to clubs as far away as Branford and New Haven. All the players on our teams are required to submit their report cards to our Education Coordinator, Sally Grose. If their grades are in trouble, she confers with them, their parents, their guidance counselors and sometimes with an appropriate tutor.

Jonathyn Young, 18, is a co-captain of our-18-and under team. He has played in many USTA tournaments and done well, "But," he said: "being on our traveling team is special. Traveling together, rooting for each other and winning or losing together, connecting with each other on the trip home is such a good way to make friends." Jonathyn is a senior at Brien McMahon High school. He



Our 14 and under team L to R: Shevrine Lezeau, Sraavani Akarapu, Jonathan Young (assistant Coach), Pratyusha Chintalapudi, Isaiah Rodriguez, and Elijah Paulk.

has been contacted by the tennis coaches at Pace University and at Post College about a possible scholarship.

Our Director, David Kimani, observes that all our youngsters want to make the traveling teams. David stresses sportsmanship as well as skill when he makes his selections. Ceira Kitt, 11, of our program, won the USTA Connecticut Junior League Tennis Sportsmanship Award in 2010.

Portrait of A Player... Fred Mezdor

LAST YEAR he was the male lead in the Greens Farms Academy performance of "Annie Get Your Gun." This year he played the role of Bert Jefferson, the reporter who steals the heart of the secretary of "the Man Who Came To Dinner" (Fred enthralled the audience with his character's drunken cavorting). He is going to Carnegie Hall this spring to perform with the American High School Chorus.

Fred Mezdor has been part of Norwalk Grassroots Tennis for eight years. As one of our best players, he is among the teenagers who have become invaluable Assistant Coaches. When our younger teams travel to clubs and tournaments, Fred is often put in charge of the group. Sometimes when our Director, David Kimani, temporarily has to leave our four-court facility at Springwood Park, he asks Fred to supervise

the whole site. Fred is very good at it.

We were recently shown a notice the Mezdors received from the Head of the Upper School saying "Fred has had an exceptional fall semester at Greens Farms Academy and has earned the distinction of 'High Honors' ... the Upper School faculty is proud of his accomplishments. Congratulations."

Fred, a GFA senior, has interviewed at Princeton University, and is applying to Brown, Yale and several other colleges. He will be the co-captain of the Greens Farms tennis team this spring.

Our program is very pleased to be able to say that Fred is one of us.



Fred Mezdor, singer, actor, scholar, tennis player

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David Kimani, Executive Director

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The Director's Column



David Kimani

THE WORDS of our mission “changing the lives of inner-city children through tennis”- sound very ambitious. In fact, my experience over the ten years I have worked with NGT is that we actually help the kids in very different ways, and to different extents.

The lowest level of help we can offer them is giving them a chance to learn a sport that they can use for a lifetime, to make friends and to keep active. At the next level, many children find they enjoy tennis and are eager to come to the courts as much as they can. These youngsters are not on the streets and are getting exercise they might otherwise not get. Above that are the kids who really want to improve. These are youngsters who we can help a lot. They are the ones who try hard. Often they have not had much experience in trying hard at anything. One of the very best things we can do is show these children the wonderful things that happen when you really try.

Their improvement, of course, strengthens their connection to tennis, the staff, and to tennis-playing friends. More important though, is the growth of their self-confidence. It is wonderful for me to see the change in some kids from being passive, quiet, and uncertain into being tough competitors and even good teachers.

At a NGT benefit a few years ago one of our players

told the audience that Grassroots Tennis had “given him hope”. He had been living at home, at odds with his mother, staying in his room with the door shut most of the time. He had friends who were involved with stealing cars. But he loved tennis. It turned out that he had a strong urge to teach, and that younger kids liked him a lot. We trained and hired him. He graduated from high school and attended Norwalk Community College.

The children we target are the ones who are the poorest and have the most family problems. A lot of youngsters like that do not graduate from high school. All of our kids graduate. A couple of our young people have gotten jobs outside our program teaching tennis and a few have a chance to go to college on a tennis scholarship. Of the more than 300 children we deal with each year, only a few will reach that level, but because of NGT all of them will have a chance.

SAVE THE DAY FOR PLAY IN MAY

Our popular Play In May benefit party and doubles tournament will be held this year on Friday evening, April 29th at the Tokeneke Club, and Saturday, April 30th at various other private clubs. Events will include; Men's A & B + 55; and Women's A,B,& C. The entry fee is \$125/player and includes dinner Friday evening and lunch on Saturday. Contact Play in May at Playinmay@yahoo.com