

A Child's Tennis Haven

Walking into the Longfellow Club in Wayland, Massachusetts, is like waking up in a dream world for kids that love tennis. Besides the bright colors and kid-friendly staff, there are no normal size tennis courts here. Those can be found across the street at the adult club. This is a kids-only tennis zone equipped with four 60-foot courts, eight 36-foot courts, low-compression balls, and everything else a child could want in a tennis paradise.

"There are many good facilities in the area, but everyone recognizes that Longfellow is the place where children go to learn how to play tennis and be appreciative and respectful," says Alan Cohen, father of seven-year old Gia Cohen who has recently started playing at the facility. "The people at our old club actually told us to come here because she can learn best on these courts."

The kids program at Longfellow called ZipZone Tennis, was created last summer and follows the Quickstart Tennis Format. The staff was starting to become discouraged with the lack of progression kids had with the game on normal size courts. So they put their heads together and decided to turn an abandoned parking lot across the street into ZipZone Tennis courts using the Quickstart design. Word soon got out about the new facility and kids wanting to learn tennis have been knocking on the door ever since.

"We have about 200 kids every week participate in our summer camps and we had more than 300 new kids start playing tennis this year on the ZipZone Courts," says Phil Parrish, Co-Director of tennis at Longfellow Club. "Our business is up 20% right now in a down-economy and I can attribute that to ZipZone Tennis."

To keep things fun for the kids, ZipZone tennis has kids playing points and games within the first week of them picking up a racquet. They also incorporate fun activities like Tennis and a Movie night where kids come on a Friday evening and play tennis for a few hours then get to eat pizza and watch a G-rated movie.

"I think the best part of this program is that it gives the kids an opportunity to actually play. This allows tennis to be a little more like other sports," says Parrish. "If a child starts playing in the program on Monday, they can usually get into some type of competition by the weekend. It's amazing what they can do on these courts."

The kids that play at Longfellow are not only seeing great results but are learning to love the life-long game as well. Seven-year old Gia Cohen first came to Longfellow at the beginning of the summer and has already moved up from the 36 foot courts and is playing matches against older kids on 60 foot courts.

“Before Gia went to Longfellow she could hardly serve and had a really hard time covering the court. Now she can make about 85% of her first serves and her footwork has improved tremendously,” says Alan Cohen. “This has allowed her to have a greater sense of self-esteem since she can play better quicker.”

Gia loves the game so much that playing on the ZipZone courts just isn't enough for her. She was always asking for more so her father decided to build a hitting wall in their backyard. Now she can go out and play anytime she wants.

“We're not looking to turn her into a pro,” says Cohen. “We want to make her a happier girl who has something she can feel good about and playing tennis at Longfellow has done just that.”