

HOW TENNIS SAVED WESTWOOD

Austin's Westwood Country Club, established nearly sixty years ago on the old McClendon Lakeview Estate, initially called for the construction of one tennis court. Fortunately for future Austin tennis buffs, Westwood built two tennis courts, with plans to build more as needed in 1957.

During the early 1970's, Westwood as a "family club" nearly collapsed. The main clubhouse was an abandoned shell of a building that offered no dining or food services to members. The swimming pool was only open three months out of the year and there was no fitness center. Still, Westwood's tennis was flourishing. This was due to an incredible, worldwide tennis explosion occurring throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Tennis became the "it" sport during the economic and political turbulence of the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1974, tennis participation in the U.S. dramatically increased from 10 million to 30 million. The sport was no longer a "secret sport" nestled behind the walls of private clubs, but a worldwide phenomenon that correlated with the rise of other popular individual sports like aerobics and jogging. Perhaps the most well-known popular culture event of the 1970s centered on the sport of tennis – the "Battle of the Sexes" match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs. King beat Riggs in front of an estimated 90 million viewers worldwide (50 million in the U.S.) and in front of an audience of over 30,000 at the Houston Astrodome in 1973. It was the largest audience to watch a tennis match in U.S. history.

Just as the popularity of tennis grew worldwide, many in the Austin area joined the sport and sought out Westwood. By the early 1980s, Westwood had more than seventeen tennis courts, increasing their need to add additional member services and space.

Starting in 1985, Westwood began to renovate, starting in the main clubhouse. Renovations lasted almost twenty years as the main clubhouse added formal dining areas, fitness areas for racquetball and squash, administrative offices, and tennis pro shop near the courts.

Starting in 1974, the Westwood Senior Invitational began, and it is one of the largest, most popular senior events in the state. Over forty years later, the Senior Sectional continues to be a success. Westwood continues to nurture its tennis community and has strong ladies, men and junior tennis programs. In fact, Westwood has the largest junior tennis program in Austin. The beautiful spaces and impeccable services offered at Westwood would not be accessible today if not for tennis. Truly, tennis saved and improved Westwood.