



# Bonnie Vona Breaks Tennis Record for Military Families to Celebrate July 4th

By Jean Pletchette

As many of us planned our Independence Day activities, Bonnie Vona was completing a record-breaking performance at the Montgomery TennisPlex in Boyds, Maryland.

Vona, Senior Manager of Junior Competition & Player Development with the USTA's Mid-Atlantic Section, aimed to surpass the Guinness World Record total -- 36 -- for the most consecutive matches in tennis singles.

And she undertook that challenge in support of ThanksUSA, a national charity in its 11th year of providing need-based scholarships for children and spouses of U.S. military personnel.



Bonnie Vona with former Wimbledon quarter-finalist Dan Goldie

The mother of two daughters, one of whom is a First Lieutenant in the Army, Bonnie Vona began her pursuit at 8 am on Friday, July 1st. She played match after match into the late-morning hours of July 2nd.

Opponents ranged from Montgomery TennisPlex top-ranked juniors and their coaches to middle-aged recreational players and corporate sponsors. ThanksUSA CEO Bob Okun and President Kevin

Schmiegel challenged Vona, as did military personnel.

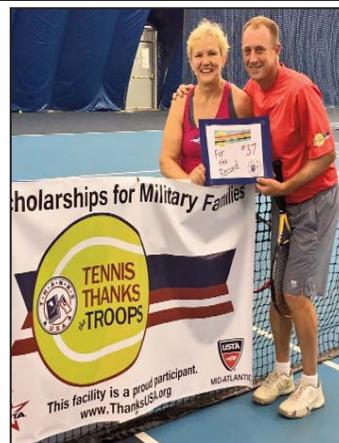
Her most talented opponent was Dan Goldie, former NCAA champion and a Wimbledon quarter finalist. At 61, Bonnie did not intend to win all her matches; rather, her goal was to keep playing.

As part of Tennis Thanks the Troops, the United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA) and ThanksUSA have teamed up. Montgomery TennisPlex supported this Tennis Thanks the Troops effort by hosting the 72-Hour Salute, beginning with Vona's tennis marathon and wrapping up with 4th of July activities. These included a Firecracker Open L8 tournament; Montgomery's largest tennis clinic; a USTA Mid-Atlantic sponsored Fast Serve and Target Serve contest -- and the finale was a Racquets and Rockets tennis mixer and fireworks party.

Guinness World Records rules are stringent. For every continuous hour of play, Bonnie accumulated five minutes of rest. In that precious window, she would rush to her personal port-a-pot right outside the tennis bubble and a quick bite to eat. Bonnie's main hydration sources were water, and combinations of pickle, beet and tomato juices. Quick nutrition was usually a bite of chicken, peanut-butter sandwich or fig newton for a treat.

Guinness guidelines required two people courtside at all times, acting as a witness and recorder of official log books. The organizers and volunteers must keep accurate track of playing time and rest time while making sure the entire marathon is documented on video. As players, medical personnel, ball boys and girls, and personal assistants for Bonnie, lots of additional volunteers (including her daughter and son-in-law) played key roles.

Bonnie was a serving machine, recalling only four double faults. Bonnie's support team included USTA Mid-Atlantic co-workers as volunteers and players -- and



Bonnie Vona and Jamie Peterson

the record-breaking match was against Jamie Peterson, USPTA Mid-Atlantic's President.

As noted, the number to beat was 36. Bonnie completed her stretch at approximately 9:30 a.m. on July the 2nd with 38 matches. The information and video verification are being submitted to the London-based Guinness Company for verification to stand as an official record.

So what encouraged Bonnie to attempt this incredible show of stamina on the tennis court? "Anything that brings attention to our military and their families is valuable," she told us, "and ThanksUSA is one of the best organizations supporting our Armed Forces and their dependents. And of course tennis is a wonderful sport -- with multiple health, mental and social benefits. What a great combination!"

ThanksUSA Scholarship recipients Darius Williams-McKenzie, an army reserve dependent, worked the weekend while Navy dependent Charlotte Oren was on hand for much of Saturday. Both are a reminder of Bonnie's motivation of pro-

viding more scholarships for military families. "I think it's really important to acknowledge the inspiration I get from our military, who do so much for us and our freedoms; they are an amazing fighting force, but also an amazing force for good."

"A marathon like this doesn't happen without a terrific team," Vona added, and offered a list: "ThanksUSA and its supporters, Life University & Dr. Mark Kovacs; Jack Schore, Elliott Datlow, and Vicki Datlow at Montgomery TennisPlex along with staff, coaches and players at their beautiful facility; Karen Merrill for help with my aches and pains; Wilson Tennis; USTA Mid-Atlantic; my daughter and son-in-law who both serve in the Army; and family and friends who supported this project. It was a special experience and, had we not benefited ThanksUSA, I would not have put in the months of preparation to be worthy of the challenge."

Special appreciation to ThanksUSA sponsors Intelligent Decisions, Halfaker and Associates, Edelman who provided social media. The Germantown, Maryland, Marriott Fairfield Inn & Suites staff were enthusiastically supportive, and their accommodations for an array of marathon participants were first-rate.

The day after the tennis marathon, Bonnie still had the adrenaline rush from surpassing the record. And, sore feet notwithstanding, she was looking for the next tennis challenge. Right on cue, Paula Faris on Good Morning America commented that Djokovic was now available to be her next opponent.

Want to know more about tennis? Feel free to e-mail Bonnie at [Vona@mas.usta.com](mailto:Vona@mas.usta.com) or check out [www.midatlantic.usta.com](http://www.midatlantic.usta.com). The ThanksUSA military-scholarships website is [www.ThanksUSA.org](http://www.ThanksUSA.org).