Anyone who plays tennis knows that the game is so much more than what happens on the court. No one knows this better than Isaac Cortes, an Army, Air Force and Navy Veteran who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and a Traumatic Brain Injury as a result of a deployment to Iraq in 2003.

For years Isaac struggled to manage his anger and depression, which had taken a heavy toll on his relationships with his family.

He was skeptical about the game at first, but as time went on he felt the stress melt away and he began to open up to the people around him. Following the camp, Isaac began to dedicate himself to the sport. He detected that there are many similarities between tennis and his experience in the military: "The military requires a lot of discipline and hard work to overcome obstacles and the same applies to tennis." The instructional nature of tennis reminded Isaac of the instruction he received while serving in three branches of the military, and so it seemed natural that he should gravitate towards it.

On May 21, 2017, the San Diego District Tennis Association (SDDTA) and Balboa Tennis Club held their 17th Annual Tennis Fest – one of, if not the largest free tennis festivals in the country. For many years the SDDTA, Balboa Tennis Club staff and volunteers, with assistance from the San Diego community and on-court instruction by over 60 USPTA tennis pros have been important supporters of Tennis Thanks the Troops. Tennis Thanks The Troops is a partnership with ThanksUSA and the United States Professional Tennis Association to raise money for scholarships given to the families of U.S. military personnel. All funds raised through a silent auction of over 50 beautifully arranged baskets, a labor of love by Manuela Griffin, were donated to ThanksUSA.

This year they were the top fundraiser and grand prize winner of Tennis Thanks the Troops’ trip to the US Open, and it was not a difficult decision to choose their recipient for the prize. According to Steve Kappes, the Association’s Director for Military Outreach, “Isaac deserved the exciting trip not only because of his military service, but because tennis has become central to his well-being. It was an exciting opportunity for Isaac to strengthen his ties to the tennis community.”

Steve Kappes and Balboa Tennis Club Director of Tennis, Geoff Griffin, have a special bond with Isaac. As co-founders, they lead the Wounded Warrior Tennis Camps where Isaac fell in love with the game and, as Steve emphasizes, they are “personally invested in his recovery and his access to tennis.” That’s why Tennis Thanks the Troops and their California Ambassadors were thrilled to send Isaac and his wife to New York for their first US Open.

Isaac and his wife Anna attended their first major tennis tournament this September, and made memories that will last a lifetime. Isaac’s most memorable moment? Watching Canadian tennis star Dennis Shapovalov. For Isaac, attending the US Open was more than just a vacation. It was a chance for him to get out of his comfort zone to share his passion for tennis with others who love the sport.

It was also a reminder of how far he has come physically, mentally and emotionally since his first tennis camp in San Diego. But this is just the beginning for Isaac. He has no regrets about his choice to serve our nation in the military, and with the support of his family and fellow tennis enthusiasts there are bright days ahead of him! 🎑

With inspiration from the SDDTA Wounded Warriors Tennis Program, Tennis Thanks the Troops is supporting wounded Service Members through our very own Veterans Adaptive Tennis Clinic Program in Washington D.C. Learn more at http://www.thanksusa.org/veterans-adaptive-clinic.html. ThanksUSA in partnership with the USPTA continues to support scholarships for military families. To learn more, visit www.ThanksUSA.org.