



Top of the List

Katrina Adams, having plotted her life's path from childhood, is now charting the course for tennis in America as President of the USTA.

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

One after the other, the entries tumbled onto the page as easily as items on a grocery list: Go to Northwestern. Turn pro at 19. Retire at 30. Go into broadcasting after that. Never mind that Katrina Adams couldn't conceptualize the aspirations she was committing to paper, much less rough out a plan for how best to go about realizing them.

She was just a kid, after all—"I think 10 or maybe 12 years old," she says now—and a dinner guest at the home of her coach, Rod Schroeder, a tennis institution in her native Chicago. Somewhere around the time the dishes were cleared, Schroeder launched into a lecture on the virtues of goal setting. The only students in the audience were his son Eric and Katrina. When the pop quiz came at

the end of the talk, the girl did what she would always do when an elder sent down instructions: She played along. A sheet of lined paper was torn from a notebook, a pen was raised and she got to work. It didn't matter that she wasn't entirely certain of the point in all this.

Naturally, there were a few big lessons in this particular assignment: the importance of setting goals early, the merits of insouciance in the face of adversity and, of course, the deepened sense of purpose that comes with spelling out one's intentions. These values followed Adams on her journey to becoming a standout doubles player—one who would claim the 1987 NCAA doubles championship for the Wildcats and, as a touring pro, win 20

WTA doubles titles and rise as high as No. 8 in the doubles rankings. But it wasn't until 10 years ago, well after segueing from a career as a serve-and-volley dynamo to a more recent one as an ace TV analyst, that Adams would truly come to appreciate just how satisfied that impromptu supertime writing exercise had left her. "I was cleaning out some old things in my parents' house when I ran across this folder that had these goals inside," says Adams, who fell short on only one of the items on her list—but only just. "I was actually 31 when I officially retired," competing in her last tournament, the 1999 US Open, three weeks after her 31st birthday.

It's a template Adams figures to dust off repeatedly as she navigates from her loftiest



David Kenas

Katrina Adams, before moving into a leadership position in the sport, won seven of her 20 WTA doubles titles with Zina Garrison (right).

career perch yet: Chairman of the board, CEO and President of the USTA. The big job isn't just a big deal for Adams; it's a giant leap forward for African-Americans and Open Era tour players, neither of whom has held the tiller for the world's largest tennis governing body.

Indeed, it would be a grave mistake to think of Adams's promotion as merely a courtesy. Such a perspective overlooks the 12 years she spent on the players' council while touring and the 10-plus years she has spent inside the USTA, working her way up from subcommittee member to Board Liaison to First Vice President. That last title, which Adams held for the past two years, placing her first in the board's line of succession, didn't just task her with minding a budget that exceeds \$200 million. It also made her the shadow of then-USTA Chairman, CEO and President David Haggerty.

The tandem arrangement, which the board's bylaws mandate, is essential to preserving the continuity when the USTA meets with its analog stakeholders in Britain, France and Australia—which it does five



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times a year to discuss the operation of the Grand Slam tournaments. "We're the only [major] whose chairman serves two years un-renewable, whereas the other majors have maybe three- or four-year terms that are renewable," explains Adams, underscoring her readiness to lead. "This is something that I've been preparing for organically."

Learning by osmosis was how she picked

up tennis in the first place. She started by watching her two older brothers, Myron and Maurice, swing away with other wannabe Arthur Ashes from behind the fencing that surrounded the courts at their local Boys Club. The club's tennis program accepted only kids ages 9 through 18. A 6-year-old Katrina respected the rules for all of two weeks before wandering onto the court and

hitting ball after ball over the net. That's where Schroeder found her.

Adams was the sort of talent who would chase her game wherever it led her—from the concrete courts scattered around her house on the city's West Side to the local fieldhouse where she'd hone her ball placement on basketball and volleyball courts. "I'd have to figure out which lines"—both painted on and not—"were what, which is how I developed my serve-and-volley game," she says. "And then I'm on this wooden court where a tennis ball doesn't bounce very well. It was a humbling beginning."

It also was a solid foundation—one that helped, along with dedicated instruction, make the 5'5" Adams a tough out on the junior circuit and vaulted her to prominence as a high school player at Whitney Young. There, she'd win state championships as an upperclassman in 1984 and '85.

The on-court success and a solid GPA allowed Adams to realize her dream of attending Northwestern. In her sophomore season, the year she won the NAATAs, she and teammate Diane Donnelly won 24 consecutive matches and dropped just two sets on the way to being named an All-American for a second time. With Adams accomplishing so much more than she could've ever envisioned for the program—and in so brief a time—the only thing left for Wildcats coach Sandy Stap Clifton to ask of her best pupil was her athletic scholarship. "What do you mean?" Adams said.

"Well," said the coach, "I think it's time for you to move on to the pro circuit."

Adams, unsurprisingly, was more prepared to make the jump than she realized. During the winter break of her sophomore year, she spent a few weeks in Houston training with Zina Garrison and Lori McNeil as they prepared for the Australian Open and the ensuing winter hardcourt season. Grinding alongside those two, who by then had entrenched themselves in the Top 20, Adams discovered that a consistent work ethic was the only thing keeping her from playing on their level.

After returning to campus and waxing her teammates in the challenge matches that would establish the pecking order on the following year's roster, Adams sat down with her coach and Northwestern's athletics director and cut a deal. "Let me take the fall



At the 2014 US Open, Katrina Adams (center) presented the women's doubles trophies to (left to right) runners-up Flavia Pennetta and Martina Hingis and champions Ekaterina Makarova and Elena Vesnina.

quarter to continue playing in satellite and challenger tournaments to see if I even like touring," she told them. "If I don't, I come back in January [of '89], keep my scholarship and we never have this conversation again. But if I am [competitive on the pro level], I'll relinquish my scholarship and move on."

When Adams went on to take the 1988 Wimbledon draw by storm—dispensing with Britain's Valda Lake, France's Nathalie Tauziat and West Germany's Sylvia Hanika before falling to Chris Evert in the round of 16 of the singles draw while reaching the semifinals in doubles with Garrison—the decision to go pro was effectively made for her. That epic double-time run on the grass would go down as her finest effort in a major. After that, she would venture no deeper than the quarterfinals in doubles—albeit an impressive 11 times—or the third round in singles, which she did once apiece at Wimbledon ('89), Melbourne ('92) and New York ('95).

The setbacks are why Adams still bristles when she recalls how the Chicago papers once heralded her as a star. But what else would one call a woman who not only held her own on the biggest stages at a time when the game boasted so many greats in their prime, but also exited this golden age among the all-time Top 30 in total doubles titles?

If star isn't the right word, then maybe pacesetter gets us closer to the essence of Adams. As a player, she helped author the modern archetype for an American female

tennis champion (read: strong, nimble and non-white). In retirement, she has made a mission of cultivating talents in that image while the executive director of the Harlem Junior Tennis and Education Program. "The work she does there is so consistent with the legacy that she has been working on with other African-Americans who preceded her," says Camille Mosley, who was married to one of those trailblazers. Dwight Mosley, the USTA's first black board member, had been active in the organization since the mid-'80s and was on track to make chairman until a brain tumor cut his career and his life short in 1996, at age 45. "I'm terribly excited that Katrina has been selected to head the USTA," Mosley adds. "It's long overdue."

In her new office, Adams intends to make a priority of bringing the game to another underserved community: Latinos. "We've been working on it," she says. "We've started to develop some ideas and strategies, and hopefully we can have an impact in that area. There are tons of athletes in those communities that we're just not touching. That's an area where there's a chance for growth."

The initiative seems like a perfect first item for a new to-do list. Don't be surprised if, at the end of her two years, she has that—and more—scratched off. ●

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