



Special to the Reading Eagle: Tom Boland | USTA president Katrina Adams: "We're about grass roots, about getting rackets into people's hands, getting rackets into kids' hands and getting them involved in our sport."

Mike McGovern: Adams well-suited for her role as USTA president

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By [Mike McGovern](#)

Sometimes you can just tell about a person, in no time at all. When Katrina Adams got off the elevator and stepped into the lobby of The Abraham Lincoln Hotel Thursday evening, there was an aura about her, a presence that exuded confidence and let you know she was in command.

And that was before she said anything.

Talking to her made it clear that the U.S. Tennis Association has the right person for the job.

Katrina Adams is nine-plus months into her two-year term as chairman of the board, CEO and president of the USTA. At 47, she is the youngest ever to hold the position. She's also the first African-American and just the fourth woman to ascend to the top spot.

"I've been told I'm a pioneer, paving the way," said Adams, who is equal parts engaging and dynamic. "But I don't think you really understand that until you're out of it and look back upon it. Right now, I'm not moving forward with those accolades in the back of my mind. I'm moving forward with making sure our strategies and policies are managed by our board, and that we have a staff to execute those strategies and policies. For me, that's the ultimate goal: moving forward and growing tennis."

Adams was in Reading as the featured speaker at a fundraiser for the city's COR Tennis program, which has been in existence since 1998 and provides instruction and opportunities for kids and their families.

COR Tennis has been recognized for its excellence numerous times over the years by the Middle States Tennis Association and the USTA, and it's just the kind of program Adams believes is critical to growing the game and making it more diverse.

The goal of inner-city community tennis programs isn't necessarily to develop the next world No. 1, although as Adams said, "You never know where your next champion is going to come from."

Their broader mission is to introduce kids to a sport they might not otherwise realize is an option.

In addition to getting involved in a sport they can play until they're four score and then some, kids also learn the importance of sportsmanship, fair play, structure, setting goals and hard work. They'll make new friends and engage in an activity that gets them out of the house and keeps them off the streets.

And one more thing: They'll have a ball.

"If we can get a champion tennis player coming out of Reading, then congratulations," Adams said. "But if Reading develops kids good enough to get a college scholarship, then Reading is being successful, the sport is being successful and the USTA is being successful. We're hoping to build champions in tennis and in life."

The kids win either way.

And U.S. tennis is winning to hear Adams tell it. "Flourishing," is how she put it, citing two Americans in the U.S. Open junior boys title match, a finalist in the junior girls title match and 11 women ranked in the Women's Tennis Association top 100, with Bethanie Mattek-Sands just missing at 101.

There are only six American men ranked in the Association of Tennis Professionals top 100, with John Isner the highest at No. 18.

But Adams insists the future is bright there, as well, with "about 10 (17- and 18-year-old) boys coming up that will definitely make a name for themselves in the professional game; they're looking really good."

Time will tell if she's right, but time is something Adams doesn't have too much of. It's taken her until now to establish her agenda and initiatives, which have just reached the "execution stage." That leaves just 15 months for her to get results.

Her varied background will help. Adams grew up in Chicago; was a player at the high school, college (Northwestern) and professional levels; and worked as a TV commentator. She was a USTA board member for 10 years.

"All that allowed me different opportunities to understand the thought processes in moving from stage to stage," she said. "But I would say being an African-American provides me a platform with a different culture and to communicate and be respected in a different way than maybe some of my predecessors had. So I think it all kind of comes together, but for me, at the end of the day, it's all about me trying to move the sport forward, and I happen to be an African-American."

Adams realizes her time is short, and that two years is probably not long enough for "anyone to be as successful as they want."

But even though she can hear the clock ticking, she refuses to look any further ahead than the "next day, the next challenge or the next to-do list."

Topping that list are continuing to oversee the construction at the Billie Jean National Tennis Center - a roof, a new grandstand and moving the south courts to create a more expansive walkway - and making a concerted effort to reach out to the Hispanic community, a population she says has been underserved.

"When I look back, I'll look at the percentage of growth," Adams said. "How many more Hispanics are playing tennis because I made an effort to get them engaged? When I look at sportsmanship, our game has gotten better; the bullying has diminished somewhat. But it's about fair play, not just winning on the court, and not just the kids' behavior, but the parents'. I think we have an issue with parents' behavior that trickles down to the kids. "I'll look at the 300,000 high school players and how many stay in the game. How many seniors are staying in the game? If all those numbers have grown, then I can say I did a great job and that I was successful.

"We're about grass roots, about getting rackets into people's hands, getting rackets into kids' hands and getting them involved in our sport. Hopefully it's something they can love for a lifetime."

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