

# Women In Tennis Together



Twenty-four regional high school girls participated in the 2019 WITT (Women in Tennis Together) event held on April 6 in Middlebury, Vermont. Colchester, Harwood, Rutland, and Middlebury High Schools were represented by the young women whose experience in the sport ranged from enthusiastic beginner to varsity player. While the day began with a chill in the air, the on and off court activities keep them moving – watching, drilling, competing, and talking about the game they love.

Organized by Addison Community Athletics Foundation Manager Erin Morrison and staffed by local pros, players, and USTA officials, the day began at Middlebury College Nelson Recreation Center with breakfast and group activities led by Audrey Olson and the TOC (Tennis on Campus) USTA affiliate. Morrison's take on the event is that being a part of a community is vital to self-discovery and empowerment. By providing an opportunity for participants to meet peers from around the state, the girls quickly shared their interest in and passion for the sport. The groups broke to watch 5<sup>th</sup> ranked Middlebury Panthers D-3 team do their pre-match warm-ups then take on 6<sup>th</sup> ranked women from Wesleyan University in doubles. (It would be a stellar weekend for the Panthers who would post wins over Wesleyan, Emory University, and Connecticut College.) It was fast, competitive, and exciting tennis that made the girls eager for the activities to come.

By noon the girls arrived at MIT (Middlebury Indoor Tennis) for lunch, introductions to their all-female on-court coaching staff, and two plus hours of drills, instruction, and competitive play. Both challenged and elated by their time on court, the girls stopped for water, a snack, and the opportunity to hear from five women whose experience in tennis demonstrates the sport is truly the game of a lifetime. Moderated by accomplished player and Burlington High School Athletic Director Jeanne Hulsen,

the group of five panelists included tennis pro and Sports and Fitness Edge Tennis Director Tammy Azur, Burlington High School Women's Coach Sasha Fisher, lifelong tennis powerhouse Allyson Bolduc, Inclusion and Diversity Manager for USTA New England Chantal Roche, and Deborah Larkin, advocate for Title IX gender quality, women's leadership, and health and wellness advocate for at-risk youth. Each speaker addressed the joys and challenges that face young women in sports, tennis, and life in general, and then entertained the crowd with their tennis stories, offering insights into how the young women can keep learning, competing, and growing. "The girls can learn practice, goal setting, communication, dealing with emotions from joy and elation, to disappointment and failure, teamwork, discipline and preparation," said Hulsen, when asked about the gifts of the game. "It's a phenomenal platform for learning life skills," she added. The afternoon ended with gifts and gratitude shared all around.

Event sponsors included USTA New England, Middlebury College Center for Community Engagement, RISEVT, Route 7 Sandwich Shop, Middlebury Discount Beverage, and Middlebury College Tennis. A special thanks to Rachel Kahan, Bree Cotroneo, Joanna Beall, Emily Lyons, Lauren Lang, Karen Didricksen, Amy Degroot, Amy Berkman, Kristin Hartley, and Laury Shea for giving their time, expertise, and energy to young women whose passion for tennis maybe a stepping stone to a lifelong love of the game.

Plans are already in the works for next year's event in the hopes that USTA Vermont might assist the organizers in putting together WITT workshops in other locations around the state. Before leaving the all-day event, the girls were asked what changes might improve the empowering all-female WITT get togethers.

**The answer was unanimous: "More tennis!"**

