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Conti loves his work—and he's successful

BY DAVID W. STEWART

Every once in a while you have the opportunity to talk with someone who has become extremely successful in the business end of something he has enjoyed since childhood, someone like Mark Conti and something like tennis.

Conti has just become the owner of his fourth indoor tennis facility, the Farmington Racquet Club in Farmington.

The 30-year-old entrepreneur said his success can be traced to his management team. What he didn't say is that he spends 15-16 hours a day, seven days a week, guiding the activities at each of his clubs.

Conti, who owns a home in Birmingham, grew up on the east side of Detroit. His dad started him swinging a racket at the age of 9, and nine years later he was ranked No. 1 in the mid-west and seventh nationally in the boy's 18's. He played Junior Davis Cup and was considered one of the top eight most promising junior players in the United States.

Receiving a full tennis scholarship to the University of Michigan, Conti won the Big Ten singles championship two consecutive years. The second year, he also won the doubles with another Detroit area native, Jon Hainline.

While at the university, Conti started teaching part time at the Bloomfield

Tennis House in Birmingham. Following his junior year he dropped out of school to take the position of head pro at the Square Lake Racquet Club.

"I saw an opportunity to get into business and started the area's first large scale instructional program," said Conti. The first year more than 2,000 students learned tennis in his program.

After three years he and his wife Lee, whom he met in one of his beginning classes at the Bloomfield Tennis House, decided to travel for six months. Conti competed in tournaments in Mexico, England and Las Vegas. While in Mexico, the couple won a mixed doubles tournament.

After returning to the Birmingham area, Conti wanted to get back into the business end of tennis. He couldn't find the right situation in this area, so he bought his first club in a suburb of Minneapolis, Minn. and kept it for 1 1/2 years.

After his stint in the North, Conti came back home. He leased some land from the City of Oak Park and erected the area's first bubble facility, the Oak Park Racquet Club. The club started with five courts and has expanded to 10.

Conti built his second bubble club, the Royal Oak Racquet Club in Royal Oak, two years ago. Last year he took

control of the Court House Tennis & Racquet Club in West Bloomfield, a structure that houses six courts with five outdoor courts covered by a bubble during the indoor season. The club also has two racquetball courts, and Conti plans to add two more for the 1979-1980 season.

Anyone who thinks tennis isn't big business, should ponder the \$4 million worth of real estate Conti controls housing 37 tennis courts and two racquetball courts.

"Our projected gross sales are \$1.6 million for the coming indoor season," said Conti.

While buying more courts is a possibility, if the business climate is right, Conti is thinking about diversifying his interests.

He is presently considering expanding into construction.

"I built the Oak Park and Royal Oak clubhouses, and I'm building two new racquetball courts at the Court House," Conti said, "so I may continue to expand in this area."

Conti has had to give up on competition for the present. He doesn't have the time while running his tennis empire. He does plan to some day return to it.

Nine years ago, Conti quit school to get into the business side of tennis and that business has never stopped growing.



The Farmington Racquet Club, Marc Conti's newest acquisition. He also owns the Court House Racquet Club in West Bloomfield. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

"Babe" golfers net record in ACS benefit

BY MARTY BUDNER

The fourth-annual Babe Zaharias Invitational Golf Tournament was bigger than ever.

The tournament, held Monday at Rochester's Great Oaks Country Club, netted approximately \$55,000 for the benefit of the American Cancer Society. The gross profit was close to \$80,000.

"It was absolutely fabulous," said Lisa Nirider, director of fund raising for the American Cancer Society, headquartered in Southfield.

"This was the largest fund-raising event for the American Cancer Society in the state of Michigan. And it is the largest women's golf tournament for the American Cancer Society in the country."

A Northville resident, Nirider said the money will be used to help cancer-control programs in Oakland County. Some of the profits will also be channeled into the national cancer-control

campaign.

There were 288 golfers representing 21 golf clubs and 32 communities across the Metropolitan Detroit area in attendance. It was the largest field ever.

The overall low gross winners in the shotgun start tournament were the Orchard Lake Country Club team of Jill Miner, Peg Armstrong, Kay Pierson and Mary Quackenbush. Their 18-hole score was 82.

The overall low net winners were the Wabek Country Club foursome of Elsie Samson, Susan Engelman, Suzi Goldsmith and June Young. Their score was 54.

The accurate drive winners — from the par 5, 527-yard ninth hole — were Ruth Lax from Wabek and Mary Lou Rowland from Plum Hollow.

The closest-pin winners were Peg Armstrong from Orchard Lake and Jane Ferris from Plum Hollow at the par 3, number 8 hole. The other winners were Jill Miner from Orchard

Lake and Doris Booth from Oakland Hills at par 3, 163-yard 16th hole. Great Oaks, Red Run, Birmingham, Franklin Hills and Farmington were some of the other county golf clubs represented.

THE BABE ZAHARIAS Interclub Golf Tournament began in 1976. The tournament is designed to allow Detroit-area women golfers a chance to compete while raising funds to help the fight against cancer — the mysterious disease which killed Zaharias.

Babe Diddrickson-Zaharias was one of the country's premier woman athletes. A natural athlete, she was a showman who loved publicity, but yet was humble and gracious enough to sign autographs for admiring fans.

Born in Beaumont, Tex., in 1911 as Mildred Ella Diddrickson, she rose from the hardships of high school athletics to gain nationwide acclaim. In 1938 she married George Zaharias — a profes-

sional wrestler — in St. Louis.

It was in the 1932 Olympics at Los Angeles where the young Texan first gained notoriety. Zaharias won gold medals in the javelin, 80-meter hurdle race and just missed another in the high jump.

Zaharias later barnstormed the country, showcasing her multitudinous athletic abilities. Among them included baseball exhibitions (where she once performed in Detroit), and basketball shows.

However, it was golf that eventually led to Zaharias' national immortality.

She turned professional in 1934. Zaharias was named Woman Athlete of the Year in 1945, and again in 1947.

In 1946, she registered an incredible string of 17 straight golf tournament victories. Only Byron Nelson — with 11 straight in 1945 — has come anywhere

near that accomplishment.

In 1949 Zaharias was the leading professional women's money winner on the golf tour with \$3,400. Her biggest single-tourney career cash prize was \$2,100. In her best year, she earned \$15,087.

Zaharias was a charter member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), which she helped establish late in her career. She was the first woman to hold a club professional job — at the Sky Crest Country Club in Chicago where she earned \$20,000 per year.

Tennis and Crumpets benefit tourney planned

Private and public tennis courts throughout the area will serve as sites for the 13th annual Tennis and Crumpets mixed doubles tournament.

The tournament, played to benefit Children's Hospital, gets under way with round robin preliminary rounds Sept. 8 and 9. Area winners will advance to the Oakland County finals Sept. 22 at the Beverly Hills Racquet Club.

The Super Finals of the tournament, involving players from both Oakland and Wayne counties, will take place Sept. 23 at the Farmington Racquet Club. Professional tennis player Wendy Turnbull, winner of this year's Detroit Avon tournament, will be a special celebrity guest.

The Tournament has four levels of competition: Open, one professional or college team member and one amateur, or two amateurs; Class A, advanced; Class B, intermediate; and Class C, novice.

Tennis and Crumpets in the past has raised more than \$480,000 for Children's Hospital. A goal of \$30,000 has been set for Oakland County this year. The money will be used to finance the hospital's psychiatry-psychology department.

Persons interested in playing should send \$12.50 per individual to Mrs. P.W. Spaulding, 6397 Sunningdale, Birmingham 46010.

For more information, contact Mrs. Thomas J. Bass at 647-4584.



On-TV: It's a raw deal

It seemed like a dream come true.

Catching Detroit Red Wing home games, Michigan, Michigan State and University of Detroit hockey and basketball games, and when they weren't on, a good movie, something that was shown at the theaters just a few months ago, would be.

And best of all, no commercials. No more having to watch Mr. Whipple squeeze the Chairman or Pinet Fouch patrons crying about the loss of the whitening ingredient from the fabric softener.

No more Ollie Pretter, Walt Lazar or Mr. Belvedere. On-TV, the pay television station that covers Oakland County and parts of Wayne and Macomb, would allow me to watch sporting events and movies without interruption. It seemed almost too good to be true.

I almost fell for it, in fact. I called up the company's Troy sales office, and was enticed by the salesgirl on the other end of the line with movies like California Suite, A Bridge Too Far, Coma, Silent Movie and Jaws. And then there were the sporting events. But finally, I had to ask.

How much is all this going to cost?

"It's \$22.50 a month service charge," was the answer. And the installation fee? "\$99.95, \$50 of which is a deposit on the box we put on your TV."

I SERIOUSLY THOUGHT about it — for about five seconds. That's when the price sank in and, since I'm a journalist with little money, I realized that was way over my limit.

It would cost \$270 a year in service fees, not including the installation charge.

That seemed awfully high to me. When I attended Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, they had cablevision, a system which would allow a person to pick up TV stations from cities like Detroit, Chicago, Jackson, South Bend, Battle Creek and Grand Rapids.

Nowadays, it costs \$20 to get a cable installed in Kalamazoo, with a \$6 service charge per month, the Fetzer Cablevision salesman informed me over the phone.

Cablevision like that in Detroit would be of little use. Without cablevision in Kalamazoo, only about two stations can be received. In Detroit, there are the three major networks, a Canadian station and several UHF stations that can be picked up.

But in Kalamazoo, they also have Home Box Office (HBO).

HBO is nearly identical to On-TV. A subscriber can see the same sporting events (and more) and the same movies, all commercial free.

The one major difference is the price.

"Once you have the cable, it'll cost \$7.95 a month for HBO, with an \$18.50 installation charge," the salesman from Battle Creek told me.

FIGURE IT OUT. Installation for both the cablevision and HBO would cost \$38.50, with a service charge of \$13.95. A year of service charges would be \$167.40, \$102.60 less than On-TV.

However you look at it, we're getting the shaft. Pay television is an attractive proposition, but not at the price of a month's salary, with your first born male child as a security deposit. And if you think On-TV is the only game in town and if you want it you got to pay for it, then hold on. A surprise may be on the way.

In Westland, an almost unbelievable cable system is on the way, if Mayor Thomas Taylor gets his wish.

The system would allow subscribers to watch programs on a pay-as-you-watch basis. There would still be a monthly service charge (less than \$10 a month) and a hefty installation fee (\$400, spread over five years and collected in a special assessment, the mayor projects).

But special programming wouldn't be the only thing the cable offered.

It would include a computer-controlled security system, which could detect break-ins or fires and could summon the police, fire department or an ambulance in seconds.

With this kind of system, the city could afford to sell homeowners insurance at about half the going rate. And the added revenue from insurance sales and cable television would cut property taxes in half, the mayor estimates.

TO ME, THAT system seems to be a better investment than On-TV. In fact, so does Kalamazoo's HBO. So why is Oakland county stuck with the worst of the three systems?

Beats me. I figure there are four alternatives: Move to Kalamazoo and subscribe to HBO; move to Westland and wait for that system; wait for a better system in Oakland County; or go for On-TV.

"Wait," a friend of mine pointed out. "Why have pay television at all? After everyone subscribes to it, they'll put commercials on anyway, and we'll end up paying to watch them."

Oh, please, not that. I'll pay NOT to watch Mr. Belvedere, but I could never pay to watch him.

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