

Before he got involved with the Richmond Tennis Association and all of its events and programs, Tom Hood (far left, team photo) was one of the Hokies' better tennis players in the late 1970s under then coach Joe Collins.

LOVING *his* SPORT

Former Tech tennis player Tom Hood co-authored a book about Richmond's rich tennis history and is doing his best to promote the sport he loves

by Jimmy Robertson

Tom Hood has performed many challenging tasks over the course of his lifetime. He graduated with a degree from Virginia Tech, no small feat by any means. He also played tennis for the Hokies, which brought forth its own set of physical pains and time management issues.

After graduation, he played on a satellite circuit for a few years, trying to keep pace with players of professional skill. He later got into real estate and survived the constant ebbs and flows of that profession. Then he morphed into a builder and developer, other demanding trades.

But none of that compared to becoming a co-author of a book. It's a theoretically simple task of putting words on a blank page, but one that paralyzes many.

"That's one of the hardest things I've ever done," he said. "I've heard people say that before, but it really is. My wife (Teresa) says, 'Tom, you've got the ideas. You just need to figure out how to put them on paper.'

"We would have deadlines, and I'd go through my mind with ideas of whatever I was writing about at that time. But for me to sit down and

physically do the writing, that's just a challenge for me."

Hood, who played tennis at Tech from 1975-78 under then coach Joe Collins, got the job done, though, helping write a book entitled, "Richmond - One of America's Best Tennis Towns." He teamed with Eric Perkins, an attorney who has served as the president of the Richmond Tennis Association, and John Packett, a former Richmond Times-Dispatch sports writer, to pen a book about the legacy of tennis excellence in the Richmond area dating back many years, including to when Arthur Ashe was winning Grand Slam titles. The book took a year to write and Dementi Milestone Publishing, owned by Wayne Dementi, published it this past May.

The idea for the book came about in 2010 after the Richmond Tennis Association entered a contest sponsored by the United States Tennis Association, which was looking for the "Best Tennis Towns" in America. Richmond finished in the top three among the 85 cities entered.

"After that, Eric suggested we do a book," Hood said. "We do have a rich history of tennis here in

the Richmond area, so the four of us got together (Hood, Packett, Perkins and Dementi). We'd meet and discuss how the book was to be laid out, and it became clear where each of us had our own particular area of knowledge. I wrote several chapters, and my wife is an English teacher, so she helped me out.

"We all ended up writing it, and we came up with a great look for the cover. John McEnroe wrote the foreword for us, and Dementi published it this year. It was being sold at the U.S. Open bookstore during the U.S. Open, and we've had sales from California to New York. So we're kind of proud of it."

The book sells for \$29.95, and can be ordered through Dementi's website. All the proceeds go to the Richmond Tennis Association, an organization that promotes, organizes and operates a variety of tennis programs and events throughout the year for tennis players of all ages and abilities.

That Hood wants to promote tennis in the Richmond area comes as no surprise. He started playing when he was 8, and he got serious about

the sport as a teenager at Midlothian High School. Following high school, he went to the University of Richmond to go to college and to play tennis, but after a year, he decided to transfer to Tech.

"I was living at home, and while I liked Richmond, it was like another year of high school," he said. "I thought the best thing for me was to get away from home and get away from the city. I thought that would be good for me. I think I grew up a little bit once I did."

Hood redshirted his first season at Tech and started in 1975. He served as the team captain all three of his years, playing mostly at the No. 2 spot. He and Jim Milley, who would later go on to become an All-American, teamed up in doubles and actually got some world ranking points as a result of their successes.

Hood graduated in 1978 with a degree in marketing, but decided to pursue a professional career in tennis first, and he played on a satellite circuit for three years. To compare, a satellite circuit is similar to Double-A or Triple-A in professional baseball. He also played in a couple of Grand Prix events, which is akin to being on the professional circuit. His best win came against Onny Parun, who was among the top five in the world at one time and twice made it to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon.

"There comes a time when you have to make

a decision," Hood said. "Do you keep plugging along or do you go and do other things? With me, I decided to slow down and do some teaching and put some money together.

"But I eventually realized that it wasn't going to happen for me at the big-time level. I was fortunate, though. I got to travel around and play tennis, and I beat some very good players. I have memories that I will carry around for the rest of my life."

In the early 1980s, he gave tennis lessons for a while, but eventually decided to get into the real estate business, and he's been working in real estate for more than 30 years, buying, selling, building and developing. He became involved with the Richmond Tennis Association five or six years ago as a way to continue being involved in a sport he loves.

"Tennis has given me a lot," he said. "I've had a chance to do a fair amount of traveling. We played in Europe for two or three months, and I've traveled up and down the East Coast and played. I've had the chance to meet a bunch of great people. It's (tennis) just offered a whole lot of opportunities.


"We've been fortunate in the real estate business and with some different things, and it's nice to give back a little bit and take on some programs and watch them flourish and do well.

It's nice to see how it influences other people as well – just watching these young kids as they take an interest in tennis, or whether you've worked with some kids who have developed their games to the point where they're competitive and enjoying that part of it."

He has seen several players from the RTA's junior programs end up in Blacksburg, including Kate Harrington, Bridget Bruner, Jay Bruner and Hunter Koontz, a member of this year's squad. Also, current Tech coach Jim Thompson participated in the RTA's junior program years ago before playing at Davidson and then later getting into coaching.

"Jim was actually a student of mine," Hood said. "We had a winter program here, and he was one of the top players. We're fortunate to have him at Virginia Tech. He's doing a great job. He keeps us in the top 50 (nationally)."

Hood, who has been married for 31 years and has two children, will be playing a more prominent role on the tennis scene in the future. After serving as the first vice president of the Virginia Tennis Association, he recently accepted the job of president for a two-year term.

It's just the latest challenge for him and certainly will provide its share of demanding tasks. However, he'll be up for it. After all, it doesn't compare to helping write a book. 

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