

## The Lonergans



*Photo: Presentation to Kay Lonergan of the Willie Clayton Award in 2015 from Leinster Tennis President and Secretary, David Barber and Nickey Coffey*



*Photo: Catherine at Trackside LTC Tennis Academy as Qualified Play & Stay Assistant 2020*

### Secret Seven Avenger Adventure!

I could never say exactly when I first noticed it, but tennis was always part of our life growing up. It was literally all around us! It WAS who the Lonergans were – tennis followed by tennis.

One of my fondest memories growing up was being packed into a car with my mom and six others, as we set off to Castleknock to compete in a tournament. My mom, with only a provisional licence and Roger Geraghty's second-hand thirteen-year-old Avenger, and a general direction of where the courts were, bringing six excited kids through the countryside in search of junior competition glory. Not just myself and my brother Ralph, but four talented (hopeful!) tennis juniors from the Parks, off to chance their arm in the junior open. All squashed into her 1970's wine Avenger with a soft top roof (very sporty). Forget seatbelts or sat navs... 6 racquets, a packed lunch and a map was all she needed.



*Photo: Replica 1970's Wine Avenger*

We may not have won that day, but we sure had great fun! She was our driver, not just in the journey, but in how she inspired us to be the best we could be on the courts that day, to 'do our best'. Needless to say, we never managed to make it to the heights of centre court at Wimbledon as players, (as spectators, that's another story), but I'm happy to have some lasting memories and a love of the game to this very day.

### **For the Love of Tennis!**

I was too young to recall when it all started, but for sure a ball or racquet weren't too far from my hand. You see, for over 45 years my mom, Kay Lonergan, has dedicated herself to Parks Tennis. Women in tennis isn't something new for Kay, this woman is the original and has been there all along.

I recall coaches knocking at the door, phone calls about kids' tennis all hours of the day, boxes of tennis balls in the hallway marked 'to be collected'. Racquets, boxes of children's t-shirts and coach's kits in the 'overflow' shed. The Nestlé van arriving before the summer, leaving huge pallets in the garden with KitKat on the boxes. The most excitement the road ever had, chocolate bar deliveries, a new addition to our house lasting for over twenty-one years. Wasn't everyone's house like this??

She never played tennis in a club until she started working, then she met the Shelly family who introduced the Parks Tennis concept to Ireland subsequent links with the O'Loughlin family in Malahide. She fell in love with the idea of bringing this amazing game to the masses, to those who traditionally would never play the sport.

No strings attached (no pun intended), kids just brought themselves to the local park and all else was provided by the coach. Sure, it was simpler times, but the ethos holds true today. Tennis is for everyone. Hundreds of thousands of kids spent endless days in Parks Tennis all around the country thanks to Kay's work and all those other volunteers who really are living for tennis.



*Photo: U14 Winner, 1989 Parks Tennis in the Mansion House*

## **Lockdown Level - Clay!**

They say once you get the ‘tennis bug’ it never leaves you. To this day tennis is still a massive part of my family’s life. Tennis is a game for everyone and a game for life. No matter what, I will always be drawn back in.

Like many other women, tennis stopped after my college years in DCU, as life, family and my career took over. But the love of the sport never went away. I have great memories of an ever-changing international tennis team playing league, inter college matches and sure having the criac on Albert College courts, where the National Tennis Centre facilities are today. A far cry from hard tarmac courts back then.

For countless weekends and summers in my teens I coached in parks for Parks Tennis, bringing that love of tennis to other kids that was imparted to me. A few decades later I made it formal. Time on my hands during lockdown, local courts open for kids, I signed up and completed the Play & Stay Assistant Course through Tennis Ireland in Trackside Tennis Club. Maybe when tennis resumes, aiming for a Level 1 qualification similar to my brother Ralph.

Back on the courts again, a new love – clay – at my new club Rockfield Tennis Club in Artane. Not just me this time, my sister Adrienne too, attracted by Cardio Tennis. Not to rest on our laurels and following in the footsteps of our brother Trevor – former Captain and President of Clontarf Tennis Club..... it’s now our time to give back to tennis. We hope to take on more active roles in our new Tennis Club, with a great team of tennis fanatics, to develop the club and promote our love of the game. Another chapter of tennis in a family that just can’t stay away. Maybe one day we’ll get Kay back out on the courts too for a game of Rusty Rackets.

*By Catherine Lonergan*



*Photo: Kilbarrack girls team winning in St Annes Parks Finals Day, Summer Coach 1995*