

# Opinion: The eternal birthday present



Water skiing became a summer ritual at age 6.

**By Kathryn Reed**

My parents gave me a gift at an early age that I continue to enjoy today – the love of sport.

I don't know if they knew they were doing that at the time, but I thank them for it. They are why I ski (we learned together – they were 40, I was 10), they are why I play tennis (mom enrolled me in a community program at about 10), they are why I love the water (I was called a fish as a kid), and they are why I embrace the outdoors (so many family camping trips).

My earliest memories of sports center around the water – swimming and skiing. At 4 I was a fairly proficient swimmer. I went on to compete in AAU swimming, making it to Far West Championships on a relay team. At 6 I was on water skis. Not long thereafter I asked if I could try a slalom ski. Mom said not until I was good at going over the wake on both sides. I demonstrated that that day. Mom acquiesced. I learned to beach

start like she did. However, I never was able to drop back into the water without getting my hair wet as she would do.



One year of tennis at San Francisco State University.

I have such wonderful memories of ski trips to Lake Tahoe while growing up in the Bay Area. There were three families who annually stayed at a house in Squaw Valley – right on the slopes. (No wonder I think vacation home rentals are normal.) And so many weekends were also spent at Northstar – pre-village and overdevelopment.

Then there was tennis. Mrs. Lackey toughened me up. She taught us to aim for our opponent and if we felt sick, vomit off the court, and then keep playing. I'm not saying those are the best things to learn, but they've stuck with me. It might be why a year or two ago I continued playing in a USTA match despite a groin pull – quitting didn't cross my mind even though losing was inevitable. It might be why in college when I tweaked my Achilles' I was OK with the trainer taping it and still playing. All the injury did was get me out of running up the hill every practice. Not playing wasn't an option I ever considered.



Carolyn Wright, Kae Reed,  
Donna Rockwood at World Team  
Tennis in Citrus Heights in  
July.

Mom had me playing in junior leagues, which led to four years of high school varsity tennis and a year in college. I've played competitively on and off as an adult; currently I'm on two USTA (United States Tennis Association) teams out of Zephyr Cove Tennis Club.

As a kid, these experiences were about family, friends, being outdoors, and just playing. It's the same today – having fun with friends on the court, the slopes and trails.

Who knows if I would have embraced these activities if it weren't for my parents.



Angelique Kerber, eventual winner of the Bank of the West tournament at Stanford in August, lunges for a forehand. This is a tournament the reporter first went to years ago with her parents. Photo/Carolyn E. Wright/Copyright

Today, as I mark the half century milestone, I can't thank my parents enough for introducing me to so many sports – some of which I continue to participate in, some that I was never going to excel at (gymnastics), and others that I tend to spectate more than play (baseball). All of them, though, hold a special memory.

And I thank them for taking me to see professional sports – mostly tennis, a little baseball and football, the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles; as well as watching them on TV.

All of it fueled my desire to be an athlete and a sports fan.

What a present – the lifelong gift of sport.