

Kay Rector - Founder of Courts & Cocktails Tennis Club Bio

My life truly began on a tennis court, where my parents first met and fell in love in Jackson, Mississippi—where my mom purposely hit her tennis balls toward my dad's court to snag a West Point Military Cadet. (She succeeded!) My dad, a standout tennis player for West Point who later became a fighter pilot and served in the space program, introduced me to tennis at age six.

My first racquet was a Jack Kramer wooden racquet. My dad would take me to public tennis courts where he taught me the fundamentals of the game—from the one-handed backhand, the Western grip, footwork, and groundstrokes, to overheads and serving. It was not easy learning from a military dad; it was thorough and intense (more like a boot camp). However, he instilled in me strong foundational values, prioritizing both academics and athletics. Through tennis, I learned fortitude, strategy, and resilience.

At thirteen, I was showing much promise as I honed in on my tennis skills, but much to my dad's dismay, I traded my tennis skirt for a cheerleading skirt to join my junior high's cheerleading team. I ran track throughout junior high and high school and continued to cheer, so tennis took a back seat during that season.

My father retired from the Air Force in 1980, and we moved back to Jackson, Mississippi. We belonged to River Hills Tennis Club of Jackson, which hosts major senior events such as the Southern Senior Men's and Women's Clay Court Open Championships. I attended Ole Miss, majored in Sports Broadcasting, and danced for the Ole Miss Rebels. I spent my summers playing tennis at River Hills with my dad and fell in love with the game once again.

I ultimately left Jackson and moved to Atlanta to work for Pringle Dixon Pringle—which at that time was one of the largest ad agencies in the Southeast. I returned to tennis when I joined the Atlanta Lawn and Tennis Association (ALTA). I was an active member of ALTA for over 30 years, learning the intricacies of the league. I was even featured in their magazine for starting a local youth tennis league—not only to introduce my children to tennis, but to inspire other children to cultivate a passion for the game.

During the pandemic, my husband—a former Sarasota Shark and Captain of the University of Georgia Swim Team—and I decided to move to Sarasota. The sunny weather and lifestyle of boating, golf, and tennis were the main motivations for our move to the Sunshine State. Professionally, I continued blending my passions for marketing, community, and club lifestyle by working with Freedom Boat Club in their marketing and member experience teams, as well as serving as the Marketing and Communications Director at Waterlefe Golf & River Club.

Being a Southern belle from Mississippi, I have always appreciated lavish tailgates at Ole Miss, the art of hospitality, entertaining, and the unique social networking and graces of Southern culture. Courts & Cocktails evolved from a passion for the South's unique social structure combined with a love of tennis. Thus, the idea of creating a tennis club where connection comes before competition was born.