

Interview with Lewis "Skip" Hartman
SESSION 1 (10/20/2020)
Timed Log

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[Lewis] "Skip" Hartman was born in New York City [New York] in 1940. After completing college and law school and serving two years in the Peace Corps, he returned to the city.

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Hartman first got involved in tennis at an eight-week summer camp [Camp Robinson Crusoe] in Massachusetts when he was eight years old [in 1948]. He developed his game further by riding his bike to the public tennis courts down the street from his home. During the 1950s, the public courts were busy with a diverse clientele of players, though some saw tennis as a "sissy" sport. Despite playing other sports, Hartman concentrated on tennis around age twelve, seeing his greatest potential.

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Racially and ethnically, there were Europeans, Hispanics, and several Black players on the local courts. The closure and disappearance of the courts after 1956 became a key moment. The courts were adjacent to New York Hospital [now, New York-Presbyterian Alexandra Cohen Hospital for Women and Newborns] between York Avenue and East River. They were also adjacent to The Rockefeller University [then, The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research] and [Weill] Cornell Medical School. The Rockefellers donated the land [to the city], but maintained the option to reclaim it, which they did around 1955 to build on it. * The many great players who used the park while it existed offered Hartman much to watch, including Helen Jacobs, Elizabeth Richards, and Elwood Cook.

*According to *The Landscape Architecture Legacy of Dan Kiley*, in 1956, The Rockefeller University began an expansion and campus development plan.

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Despite never taking lessons, Hartman watched good players, hit a lot of balls, and became reasonably good due to the convenience of the park facility. He was undefeated in high school varsity tennis during his senior year. Never playing in junior tournaments meant he was never ranked. Yet, his competitiveness against top players allows him to take pride in having been one of the best players who was never ranked.

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Coming from an upper-middle-class family which did not have a car made competing in junior tournaments impractical. So, Hartman played in the parks, on his high school team, and at Princeton University. Despite beginning as an unknown player at Princeton, he earned a starting spot by senior year [1961 - 62].

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Hartman recounts his experience at [Robison Crusoe] summer tennis camp to illustrate how far tennis has come. He attended the eight-week camp every year from age eight and became an unpaid camp counselor

with room and board around age 15 or 16. At age 17, Hartman unsuccessfully petitioned the camp owner to promote him from assistant to head tennis counselor after effectively doing the job for the last two summers. The owner agreed to pay Hartman \$800 and allow him to set his schedule – providing time to study for his Scholastic Assessment Test, SATs. However, he hired a woman from California for the \$3,000 head counselor position. The woman turned out to be Darlene Hard, who became runner up to Althea Gibson at Forest Hills that summer [in 1957]. Hartman reflects on how despite being one of the best players in the world, the most that Hard could earn was \$3,000 plus room and board at a summer camp.

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The introduction of television as a factor in professional tennis transformed the sport, providing vast exposure. Players are better supported today [than during Hard's years]. Losing in the first round of the [U.S. Open] still guarantees players \$50-60,000*, in addition to the various athletic specialists available.

* According to the U.S. Open website, both men and women singles players who make it to the round of 128 earn \$75,000.

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Hartman graduated from Princeton University in 1962 and Yale Law School in 1965. He joined the Peace Corps for two years before practicing law for three years. Motivated by financial opportunity, he left the law firm towards the end of 1970 to pursue the indoor tennis business full-time. Hartman received a city parks license to develop an air structure previously used for temporary storage facilities into a removable building for indoor tennis on public tennis courts.

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The business was launched in 1970, which coincided with the increased popularity of tennis between 1970-1977. Some attribute the growth to [the 1973 "Battle of the Sexes"] Billie Jean King v. Bobby Riggs match or the increase of role models like Althea [Gibson]. Hartman theorizes changing demographics of the Baby Boom Generation played a considerable role. As girls born during the Baby Boom entered their late twenties, they became more comfortable with resuming physical activity after the decline during puberty. Hartman estimates that when [he and his business partners] organized tennis lessons, 80% of the participants were women.

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In addition to the growing interest among women, tennis became more popular as a lifetime sport among notable athletes, like [Vernon] Earl Monroe and "Dr. J." [Julius Winfield Erving II]. The growing popularity meant that Hartman could still be very successful even while making a lot of mistakes.

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To the argument about the Open Era being a significant reason for the growth in tennis, Hartman counters with the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey victory over the [Soviet Union] and the 25% decline in hockey participation between 1980-83, despite America's success.

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Hartman argues that while there is likely a link between watching and playing sports, it is not direct. Instead, he argues for the significance of good coaching and programs at the grassroots level, as exhibited by the National Junior Tennis League (NJTL). *

* Now the National Junior Tennis and Learning network.

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Hartman recounts the beginning of his involvement with the NJTL in 1970. He gets a contract with the city to construct his first [removable air structure] over a public court in the Bronx, near the courthouse and Yankee Stadium. He seeks to do something to give back to the community, which was primarily low-income. As his business was concentrated during the winter, he considered a summer program.

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Hartman gets involved in the NJTL during its second year, in 1970, while [Eugene] "Gene" Scott is running it. Scott and Hartman both mutually know [Stuart] "Stu" Ludlum, who worked for Scott. Ludlum reached out to Hartman after hearing about the license he secured and inquired if he'd provide a site for the NJTL program. NJTL had already partnered with several park sites. Hartman saw it as a meaningful program to give back to the community.

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Hartman explains how NJTL differed from prior tennis initiatives focused on underserved youth. Programs sponsored by organizations like the Eastern Tennis Patrons recruited a big name like Billy Talbert to host a day-long exhibition and brief clinic. NJTL focused on continued engagement. Hartman appreciated that NJTL created standards requiring three hours of programming, three days a week for six to eight weeks. Since group lessons were not widely available then, NJTL's group lessons allowed young people without money to hit many balls and gain free coaching. Though he wasn't expecting to transform lives, he hoped to make a small impact and believed exposing kids to tennis could do that.

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Hartman recounts the story of a parent whose child went through the NJTL program. Ashe was important to the conceptualization of the program, as he insisted on doing something meaningful. Ashe's association with the program became a particularly good "elevator pitch" when securing funding. Nothing communicated the program's values better than saying Ashe was a co-founder.

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From its conception (1969) to the mid-80s, the program's principal goal was to develop the next great American tennis player by taking the game to black and Hispanic youth. Over time, the purpose expanded to using tennis to teach life lessons, paralleling how Ashe was more than an athlete. While some good players came out of the program, it became clearer that the program wouldn't produce the next great tennis player, especially in the modern game, without more resources and family support.

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Ashe was a very thoughtful person who worked hard to communicate his thoughts and put them in writing. Having Ashe as a role model meant that though few children might become great tennis players,

many would consider college after learning that most tennis players went to college. The program also became a bridge for those from poorer backgrounds to enter a different part of society. Thus, tennis became a tool for social and economic development.

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Ashe, Pasarell, and Snyder started NJTL [in 1969] while Ashe and Pasarell were still on tour, playing internationally. Though Ashe and Pasarell did not have time to develop the programs, Snyder implemented them. Whenever they needed to do a fundraiser or secure a sponsor, Ashe and Pasarell would be available.

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Hartman was primarily active in the New York City program [for NJTL] but joined the national board for several years, serving as the treasurer for four years around 1975-78. Difficulties funding the national development effort led to the merger with the United States Tennis Association (USTA) in 1985. * For the 16 years before the merger, NJTL was an independent nonprofit organization with its own national board, while NYC and other cities had growing chapters. While Gene Scott was the first executive director, Ray Benton was the first paid employee. Ashe and Donald Dell secured Coca-Cola to be the national sponsor in 1971, which led the offices to move from NYC to Washington [D.C.], where Dell worked. Working for Dell, Benton began working on NJTL.

* Clarification: During the interview, the date of the merger is stated as 1985. "The NJTL Network: 50 Years of Learning and Legacy" lists the official date the NJTL merged with the USTA as 1984.

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Benton worked on NJTL full-time for 2-3 years and served as executive director part-time for three more years. After Coca-Cola dropped its sponsorship around 1976 or 77, financial challenges arose. Congoleum was briefly a sponsor before the USTA merger in [1984]. Moving from the West Side Tennis Club [in 1978] to the [USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center] and the growth of television broadcasting and sponsorships allowed the USTA to generate a lot of revenue during the early 1980s.

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Hartman reflects on Ashe and Dell's commitment to NJTL. He acknowledges that some notable professional players have been affiliated with the NJTL, like Venus and Serena Williams Sisters in Los Angeles and James Blake in Harlem. Yet, the bulk of their training came elsewhere. Thus, one of the greatest impacts NJTL has had is developing college players and instilling values that included the importance of going to college.

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Hartman recounts the beginning of the New York Junior Tennis League, NYJTL. During the first summer, Hartman was a site sponsor and recruited Althea Gibson's coach, Sidney Llewellyn, to lead a program at Mullaly Park near Yankee Stadium. After the NJTL national offices moved to [D.C.], Ludlum asked Hartman if he would take over the New York program. The New York program remained legally sheltered within the national organization before securing its 501(c)3 [nonprofit] status in 1974.

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After 1971, NYJTL continued to collaborate with the [New York City Parks & Recreation Department]. As the City Parks point person, Eric Werner, who'd gotten involved in 1969, served as the tennis director for the parks department summer program. The parks department provided 40 - 50 part-time staff. NYJTL provided \$25-30,000 of fundraised money for out-of-pocket costs like shirts, equipment, trophies, and senior program management. NYJTL and the parks department maintained a relationship for seven to eight years [around 1978-78].

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The relationship between the parks department and NYJTL dissolves after a disagreement about allocating \$7,000 left over from the summer program. Hartman and the board wanted to save the money for the following summer. Werner preferred to use the money to pay his assistant as a coach for the program during the winter. Werner and the parks department kept the park program in 50 parks, and NYJTL shifted its focus to its seven to eight non-park sites that were in school and commercial sites.

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In 1982, after learning that the Department of Education would be using [John F.] Kennedy High School for its own programming, NYJTL reached out to Herb Turetzky, who's in charge of the Department of Education program. Turetzky allows them to use the tennis courts and asks them to incorporate special education programming. *

* *The New York Times* article, "The Worm and the Apple: Urban Relief; Serving Youth" on May 30, 1986, describes NYJTL's expansion to include wheelchair tennis "for immobilized youngsters and tennis for otherwise disabled children."

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After a successful summer program, Hartman and Turetzky discuss running a program during the school year in public schools. Through Turetzky, Hartman ultimately gets a meeting with [Dr.] Alan Gartner, the [Executive Director of Special Education for NYC Public Schools] and the Chancellor of schools. *

* Frank Macchiarola was the Chancellor of the New York City Board of Education from 1978 – 1983.

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In hindsight, Hartman recognizes the Board of Education's interest in improving the image of schools and how tennis supported that upscale image. NYJTL was successful in beginning the public schoolyard tennis program [around 1983] in part because there was a limited window to use the public courts for children's initiatives on the weekends due to adult use. Comparatively, the school facilities were dedicated to children. The NYJTL schoolyard program conveniently allowed the school facilities to be used after school, on the weekends, and during the summer.

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NYJTL reaches a turning point in 1984 or 85. NYJTL has to collaborate with the schools and the NYC parks department to develop courts in the schoolyards. * NYJTL must solve how to put a hole in the ground for the tennis court posts that is not a safety hazard and is easily movable. Using his background

in the indoor tennis business, Hartman hires an engineering consultant. They designed a 12-pound post placed in a hole and capped with a bronze cap that would not rust and was designed to minimize tripping hazards. Though expensive, the design was approved.

* Additional note from Hartman: "20% of the public schoolyard in NYC are jointly used by the schools and Parks Department."

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The innovation receives coverage in *The New York Times*, *. After starting a pilot program with three or four school districts for a total of 48 courts in 16 schools, by the end of the summer, every school district wanted to be a part of the program. After the first summer, they began doing everything in multiples of 32; one for each school district, which were decentralized, unlike today.

* During the 1980s, NYJTL was featured several times in *NYT*, including "Sports World Specials; Tennis, Everyone" (April 25, 1983); "Tennis Balls Go Flying in New Tennis Program" (June 9, 1983); and "Bringing a Taste of Wimbledon to City Schools" (May 10, 1986). The article in reference is likely that in June 1983.

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NYJTL developed a survey system and admitted 64 more schools every year, two in each district to keep up with the program's popularity. Admitted programs received rackets, balls, and a coach to help their physical education (P.E.) program develop tennis during the school day. After school, the courts were used for [NYJTL] tennis programs and tournaments. A middle school league was started that fielded 65 teams.

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Hartman recounts the nuances of navigating the decentralized school system where the Chancellor controlled the high schools and had influence over the budgets but didn't control the districts directly. Ashe taking the time to do school appearances between 1985 and 1992 further increased the program's popularity and expanded access to facilities. At its peak, they created over a thousand schoolyard tennis courts.

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To assess the functionality and capacity of the school facilities, NYJTL hired the son of Hartman's business partner to survey and catalog all the NYC public elementary and middle schools – the first survey of its kind for the NYC schools. The survey revealed that of the 1200 campuses, 60-70% of the schools had a yard large and flat enough for a tennis court. Of that proportion, about 60% had an area suitable for three or more courts. Thus, there were roughly 800 schoolyards where you could put tennis. Four to five hundred yards were large enough to have three or more courts suitable for quality programs with instruction and play. Subsequently, they began a massive installation of schoolyard courts. The program taught P.E. teachers to teach tennis, and during the summer, NYJTL used the best schoolyard courts for their tennis program. This gave NYJTL access to all the schoolyards in public schools.

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NYJTL also collaborated with the [New York City Housing Authority], gaining a \$700,000 housing contract to provide a tennis program in the late nineties because the program already had sites near their public housing projects. Becoming a partner of the NYC Department of Education changed people's perception of NYJTL from a recreation program to a school improvement program. Fundraising drastically expanded between 1984-6 as a result. Hartman illustrates the growth in fundraising by recounting a meeting, in 1986, with Henry Talbert, * former national director of recreation for the USTA and Executive Director for the Southern California Tennis Association (SCTA), and [John Albert] “Jack” Kramer, President of the Southern California Tennis Association. Kramer aimed to raise \$50,000 for the Southern California Tennis Association, a considerable fundraising goal at that time for tennis programs. However, Hartman projected NYJTL would raise \$500,000 that year. Hartman credits the NYJTL's perception as a school enrichment rather than a recreation program as the key to their fundraising success.

* According to USIC Tennis, Talbert was the first African-American to be a USTA administrator on the national level.

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Ashe's alignment with the program and example as the perfect role model propelled the [NYJTL] program forward. Along with the collaboration with the NYC public schools, NYJTL became larger than any other NJTL chapter. Hartman also acknowledges how critical the relationship with the department of education has been for financial support and urges other chapters to collaborate with their parks and local departments of education. After the split from the NYC parks department [in 1978], the department kept the parks, and NYJTL kept the schools. The parks became a \$200,000 program, and NYJTL became a \$15 million program.

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NYJTL founded the Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation (SASF) in 1992. After the Cold War [in 1991], schools began receiving more federal funding and seeking to expand beyond tennis to use their school facilities. Initially, the YMCA* and the Boys & Girls Clubs [of America] used their own facilities rather than school facilities, creating an opportunity to develop school-based programs of a broad range of activities. The schools approached the NYJTL about doing activities beyond tennis. Decentralization of the school districts meant NYJTL had built relationships with 32 different school districts, superintendents, and assistant district superintendents, making them well-positioned to create another school-based program.

* Originally the Young Men's Christian Association.

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Despite the high demand, NYJTL decided they could not use their funding from donors focused on tennis to fund non-tennis activities under the organization. So, they created the SASF (now called New York Edge). The program includes over 40 different activities, including jujitsu, fencing, and chorus. Today, NYJTL is a \$17 million organization, and Sports and Arts in Schools is a \$46 million organization, having continued to grow since Hartman stepped down from running the NYJTL pro bono in 2006 and the latter in 2013. Together, the programs are the largest provider of afterschool sports and academic

support in the NYC public school system. Hartman attributes the success to a great need and Ashe, Pasarell, and Snyder's initial efforts.

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Though difficult to quantify the impact of the programs due to their broad reach, the extent of the impact is undeniable. Similar to how he got hooked on tennis, now Hartman sees opportunities for young people to have that experience with chess, ping pong, music, and other activities. Several of the schools with programs funded through SASF have even won national championships. Adopting a motto from one of the school principals in Brooklyn, John Comer, the programs embraced the notion that each child has a gift. If SASF could play a role in helping them discover that gift, that would be a tremendous thing. Ashe seemed to understand that.

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Ashe and Jeanne [Moutoussamy-Ashe] lived in Northern Westchester, New York City, on 72nd Street. After his diagnosis with a heart condition in 1985, Ashe became even more available for NYJTL appearances. Ashe was always laid back and never shouted. With coaches assisting him, Ashe would teach the children tennis and talk about education. Despite not being a close friend of Ashe's, Hartman observed how committed he was to living a thoughtful life. Save for a scheduling conflict, Ashe always tried to make appearances when available.

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Hartman last recalls seeing Ashe during a speech he gave at an event about a month before his death. Hartman spoke less with Ashe in the months leading up to his passing. Hartman and the former NYC mayor David Dinkins were good friends, and Dinkins had a good relationship with Ashe. * Hartman recounts the arc of his friendship with Dinkins, beginning in 1975 when Dinkins was city clerk, and Hartman invited him to join the NYJTL board. Dinkins played doubles with friends weekly at Stadium Tennis, Hartman's first tennis club. The friendship developed even further when Dinkins became mayor in 1989. They began meeting three times a week to play tennis in the mornings near Gracie Mansion.

* David Dinkins passed away on November 23, 2020.

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Dinkins was with Ashe when he announced his diagnosis with Human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) [in 1992]. Hartman mentions the recent passing of Dinkins's wife [Joyce Dinkins] and his current health.

* Joyce Dinkins passed away on October 11, 2020.

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Dinkins was Manhattan borough president in 1985 when Ashe moved back to NYC. Dinkins then becomes mayor, and Ashe passes [in 1993] before his term is completed. The personal relationship between Dinkins and Ashe likely made it even easier for Ashe to support NYJTL, in addition to Ashe's genuine respect for the program. Hartman suggests Moutoussamy-Ashe may provide additional perspective.

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Reflecting on NYJTL and Sports and Arts demographics, there were as many girls as boys in NYJTL. The nature of the segregated NYC school system meant the programs served overwhelming Black and Hispanic populations.

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Hartman's closing thoughts on Ashe. Ashe was so much more than a great athlete. Intercepting with Ashe at the point they did allowed [NYJTL] to have a wonderful role model for the children in their program. Hartman's only fear is that people will forget who Arthur Ashe was or won't be as touched by his legacy. He hopes to see his image more associated with NJTL.

Interview with Lewis “Skip” Hartman
SESSION 2 (10/20/2020)
Timed Log

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Since 1978, Hartman owned and operated a club on 43rd Street, between 9th and 10th Avenue, in a housing project called Manhattan Plaza, which was subsidized housing for the theater industry. When AIDS hit in the early eighties, the housing project saw more people die of the disease than any other in the U.S. The project had its own hospice program, and with his tennis program nearby, Hartman had two employees who died from AIDS. The project also had one of the highest populations of gay residents in New York. Hartman experienced the impact of the AIDS crisis firsthand and the perception among some that gay people deserved the disease.

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When Arthur Ashe announced his AIDS diagnosis, it became a seminal moment in making people realize the disease was not a “gay man’s affliction.” Ashe’s subsequent advocacy with people like Dr. Anthony Fauci accelerated the commitment of federal funding and made it politically easier to support fighting AIDS.

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Hartman's last time speaking with Ashe was not long before his death. Though superficial, he always treasured the little moments he had with Ashe.