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## Players love new surfaces on the Park Strip courts

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The cracked, uneven gray face on the Delaney Park Strip just got a makeover. In its place is a smooth, bright blue, eight-court tennis complex that has veteran players and newbies waiting for court time.



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BILL ROTH / Anchorage Daily News /  
Nick Moe makes a return to Amber Wilkerson on one of the courts that were repaired this summer at the Delaney Park Strip. Moe, who was on the newly surfaced courts for the first time this summer, said he thought the previous condition of the courts, with roots cracking the surface and faded lines, kept people from playing.

Even on weekdays, players line up to use the once-neglected courts -- something avid player Janice Weiss has rarely seen at the park strip.

"We had to wait while other players finished," she said. "It was wonderful."

It's no wonder the courts are more populated, considering the transformation they've made.

"The old courts were kind of an eyesore, I'm sorry to say," said

Mallory Cox, an East graduate who plays college tennis at Upper Iowa University.

Cox remembers playing on Park Strip courts with dandelions sprouting from deep cracks. Grass grew in some of the doubles alleys, making the courts unusable for some tournaments.

"Now this is the best outdoor facility in town," Mallory said.

The vivid blue courts, bordered by crisp white lines and newly painted green out-of-bounds areas, are modelled after the U.S. Open courts, Alaska Tennis Association president Allen Clendaniel said. The U.S. Open courts switched from green to blue to improve television clarity, but Clendaniel believes it's easier for players to see the ball on blue courts.


The asphalt courts are covered with an acrylic-and-sand compound that has a higher percentage of sand than the old courts. With more sand, the ball slows down -- something Clendaniel said gives beginning players a chance to work on technique.

"It's a top-of-the-line surface," he said. "I get to play in plenty of fancy clubs -- you know, with \$30,000 initiation fees? These courts are just as good, if not better."

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The renovation got rolling in 2007, after the Alaska Tennis Association approached Beth Nordlund, the city's development director for the Anchorage Park Foundation.

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Through the foundation, the association was awarded a Rasmuson Foundation challenge: a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$35,000.

Association members held fundraisers at McGinley's Pub and private homes and even hosted an outdoor winter tournament for which they made lines by placing painters tape on the snowy old courts.

"The ball couldn't bounce, but people came out to volley," said Clendaniel.

Clendaniel said a state legislator who is a tennis fan -- Rep. Lindsey Holmes of Anchorage -- lobbied for the project and helped the association land a \$100,000 state grant.

And the U.S. Tennis Association chipped in \$20,000 -- a donation that came after Clendaniel showed pictures of the dilapidated courts to members of the USTA's Pacific Northwest board, based in Portland, Ore.

"They were shocked at what our premier public courts looked like," he said.

The project also benefitted from private donations and significant commitments from Conoco and BP.

The racquet-bearing amateurs did pretty well, raising over \$220,000, ending with money to spare.

"They worked really hard and raised the funds. It's not like they're professional fundraisers or anything. They're volunteers," Nordlund said.

"I wonder what they'll want to do next. Lots of tennis courts in the city need some love."

The association already has a few ideas for adding to the improvements on the park strip courts: windsheets, seating and a higher wall for the small warm-up court.

Although the courts are already busy, an official dedication is set for July 25 -- when association members and the public can celebrate the facelift.

"The courts are gorgeous," said Clendaniel. "We're all so jazzed."

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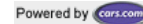
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