

Namesake's mother tops at first charity tennis tournament

- By MANUEL MORENO JR. Correspondent
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- Stuart Villanueva/The Daily News
- Beep Sullivan to hit a volley during the championship round of the Christina Grillo Sullivan Foundation doubles Tournament in Galveston on Saturday, March 4, 2017.
- Brandon Locklin goes low to hit a volley during the championship round of the Christina Grillo Sullivan Foundation doubles Tournament in Galveston on Saturday, March 4, 2017.

Charity Tennis Tournament

- Stuart Villanueva/The Daily Ne

GALVESTON

Call it divine intervention. Donald Trump might even call it rigged

But it was only fitting the first-ever champions of the first-ever The Christina Grillo Sullivan Foundation Doubles Tennis Tournament were two very close to her.

Sullivan's mother, Beep, and cousin, Brandon Locklin, teamed up to win the tournament, beating Galveston's Aeris Buss and Noah Elzner in the championship match, 8-0.

"It was very special," Locklin said afterward. "In the final, it definitely did. I really thought about (Christina) and wanted to win it for her.

"It was a good feeling, winning it with my aunt and knowing what it meant to her."

Beep Sullivan, fighting off the tears, agreed.

"It was very special, very emotional," she said. "Today was great fun and great tennis.

"I think the part I will remember the most is when someone would say her name 'Nina,' knowing that her foundation will guide others and assist them."

Both finalists advanced to the championship round with three wins apiece.

Locklin and Sullivan first beat Mike Vashon and Tammy Willner, 8-2, then followed with an 8-6 upset of No. 2-seeded Liz Castillo and Jeff Dubrow in the quarterfinals.

Later, in the semifinals, Locklin and Sullivan defeated Danny Ott and Mary Ross 8-4.

As for Buss and Elzner, the Ball High School players were just as impressive, defeating Michael Hickl and Daniel Koeppen in the first round, 8-3, and Joe Bryan and Sebastian Delgado in the quarterfinals, 8-5.

Then, to reach the final, Buss and Elzner upset No. 4-seeded Stan and Susan Dudek in the semifinals, 8-4.

In the third-place match, Ott and Ross defeated the Dudeks 8-2.

Ott and Ross earlier had beaten Ann and Kyle Reiser in the first round, 8-0, and upset No. 4-seeded Antonio Corrales and Maya Leisey in the quarterfinals, 8-4.

Over in the consolation bracket, Heidi Harrison and Gary Schero bounced back from a first-round loss to pick up three wins, including an 8-1 victory over Lydia Miller and David Rassin in the championship match.

Earlier, Harrison and Schero beat the Reisers in the quarterfinals, 8-3, and Eliza Gray and Dillon Tidwell in the semifinals, 8-5.

Miller and Rassin advanced to the final with an 8-1 quarterfinal win over Stephanie Gonzalez and Mitchell Moreno, and a 9-8 (7-3) upset of No. 1-seeded Philip Perez and Tim Lambert in the semifinals.

Along with the tennis action, which also included the team of quarterfinalists Frank Mencacci and Nancy Shipman, 8-6 first-

round winners against Gonzalez and Moreno, the tournament featured a wheelchair tennis expo and Special Olympics exhibition in recognition of March being Brain Injury Awareness Month.

Three members of the University of Houston wheelchair tennis team, Jose Arriaga, Carlos Salinas and Eric Lutz first took the courts.

“I live with MS (multiple sclerosis), and to start using a wheelchair was a very positive decision,” Lutz said.

“The reason why I was attracted to wheelchair tennis was because I played soccer for 15 years and raced bicycles. When I got into wheelchair tennis, I saw myself as an athlete again.”

Then two Special Olympics Texas athletes, Houston’s Hillary Kern and Ashley Billard, paired up with Gonzalez and Moreno to display their court abilities, both being avid seven-year tennis participants.

“I play year round,” Kern proudly said with a smile.

Beep Sullivan said the presentations “opened up people’s eyes.”

“I admire what these incredible people are doing with their lives, even though it is a challenge,” she added, thanking Cindy Benzon of the United States Tennis Association-Texas for setting up the expo/exhibition.

“I had so much fun today and can’t wait till next time,” Beep Sullivan said. “Everyone was here for Nina. All in all, it was a blessed day.”