

FUJIKI WORKING TO PROMOTE TENNIS IN NANAIMO

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An avid tennis fan and competitive player when she was a kid, Building Tennis Communities (BTC) champion Kazue Fujiki is dedicated to bringing the sport to more people in her town of Nanaimo, British Columbia.

Entering her second year as a BTC champion, Fujiki notes that Nanaimo's tennis population tends to feature mostly seniors players. And with two young sons, aged 12 and nine, she wanted to ensure kids had the opportunity and access to play tennis as well. She learned about the BTC program, an initiative between Tennis Canada and the provincial tennis associations created to grow the game in local communities across Canada, through Tennis BC and soon she was leading the charge in Nanaimo.

A few of the events she has run in the past year include a fun day fair, where she set up kids tennis equipment at a school, and a Rogers Rookie Tour tournament, both of which offered kids the chance to try the sport for the first time in an organized fashion.

"We had a steady group of people at the fair coming to play, with families and kids who just came on their own," she said while attending the BTC Conference in Toronto last month. "They wanted to play tennis so that was really good to see. And at the Rogers Rookie Tour tournament, we had about 12 or 13 kids, not a large group, but a perfect size for me because I'd never run a tournament by myself. It was great, they came out and played the tournament and a lot of them wanted to do even more organized tennis."

With her work, Fujiki is attempting to market tennis to the people in her community as the accessible sport it can be, in order to combat a common perception that tennis is only for the wealthy.

"I think we really have to change the concept of tennis as an unaffordable sport for everybody," she said. "People think of it as a rich and expensive sport, but it's actually not unless you belong to a tennis club. You can have a tennis racquet and running shoes, and you can go outside and hit the ball. So you really have to educate the parents, teachers, and the people involved in the sports and wellness sectors. That's my job, to educate people."

A large part of her success is in forging and maintaining relationships with various stakeholders in Nanaimo, such as parks and recreation departments, the city, schools, and interested volunteers, all of whom are important in creating a sustainable tennis community. One of her next steps is organizing a group of people who share her vision and can assist her in making it a reality.

Combined with her growing network of those who want to provide more tennis to the people of Nanaimo, Fujiki is working on creating new ways for kids to enjoy tennis.

"One of our focuses right now is league tennis, so I can introduce a fun way to play tennis to the kids, not just lesson, lesson, lesson," she said. "We want the model of soccer or baseball where the parents can teach as a volunteer and it's more grassroots. Everything starts from a young age, so I'd like to make it as fun as possible to get as many people in tennis as soccer."

With Fujiki's leadership, tennis in Nanaimo is definitely on the positive upswing. To join her in growing the game in your community, please click [here](#) to learn more about the BTC program.