

CLASS ACT: CHRISTIAN BOSCHERT

Christian's Special Serve

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photo BROOKE VANDEVER

When St. Thomas Aquinas (STA) senior Christian Boschert lobs a shot over the net to an opponent, he may interrupt the game to offer a bit of gentle coaching advice. That's because the 18-year-old honors student and innovator in giving back to the community has a unique partnership with some very special athletes—a relationship he's forged through his foundation, KC Tennis Buddies. Inspired last year by a nonprofit he encountered in Omaha, Neb., the avid tennis player decided to launch a similar organization in Johnson County. The focus? Athletes with Special Olympics Kansas (SOKS) and Blue Valley Special Olympics.

In a matter of months, the effervescent teen assembled a corps of volunteers, negotiated court time at the Overland Park Racquet Club with John Shaw and worked with Fred Johnson, the diversity manager at the USTA of Missouri Valley, to secure a \$1,200 grant. He worked with Nan Kanter, program coordinator for special populations at Blue Valley Rec and director of Blue Valley Special Olympics, to identify potential athletes.

With the business of building his dream under control, Boschert—who has played tennis since he was 7 and competitively since age 10—concentrated on the heart of KC Tennis Buddies: the eager athletes. Boschert and a dozen volunteers—all passionate tennis players including peers, a sprinkling of Rockhurst University students, a teacher from the Olathe School District and STA tennis coach David Shriver—conduct Sunday night clinics and match-play sessions with kids who rank the activity amongst their favorite.

"Parents e-mail and say their special athlete lists KC Tennis Buddies at the top of what they look forward to every week," says Boschert, who plans to pursue engineering at the University of Missouri next fall. "This experience definitely humbles me."

TEAM BOSCHERT: "The volunteers and I have a blast with the athletes."

SHARE THE LOVE: "Everyone who works with KC Tennis Buddies loves tennis and spending time with the athletes. It's a win-win."

FAN BASE: "My mom and dad, Tracy and Toby, and my sister Kelsey are huge supports."

SMILES AND HUGS: "They're the priceless rewards I get from working with these special athletes."

SMASHING SUCCESS: "KC Tennis Buddies goes way beyond any service hours I earn. It's about connecting on a common level with others who love the sport—regardless of ability." ❖

For more information, visit www.kctennisbuddies.com.

