

Bill grew up in Tucson, and while attending Tucson High, won the National High School Tennis Championship in singles, defeating Arthur Ashe. He won the title for a second time in 1960. He was #1 in the nation in the boys 18s, U.S. National Junior Tennis Champion (1960) and Orange Bowl Jr. Tennis Champion (1960). Bill went on to play tennis for the University of Arizona (1962-64). He was first-team Tennis All-American and ranked #13 in the NCAA and contributed to his team earning a top five national ranking each of the years he played.

Bill was a victim of bad timing in that he played before the Open era of tennis. As an amateur back then, Bill played Wimbledon twice and had wins over nine Wimbledon Champions, including Arthur Ashe, Chuck McKinley, John Newcombe, Stan Smith, Dennis Ralston, Marty Rissen and Sherwood Stewart. But Bill had a family and had to decide between taking the risk of joining the new “pro tour” and forego playing the Grand Slam tournaments. Bill opted to remain an amateur and soon realized he needed to stop playing tennis and support his family. Had he been born ten years later, Bill could have been a top ranked pro player and made a lot of money.

Bill was never bitter about what could have been. He had no ego whatsoever. He returned Arizona and earned his graduate degree. Ultimately, Bill had degrees in both mathematics and engineering.

After graduation, Bill went on to coach the U of A team and later the ASU men’s team. Bill was someone his players would run through walls for. John Byron played for Bill for two years at ASU. At the time, John was a local Phoenix player who had offers from other schools. But his mother, Marilyn Byron, had recently passed and he wanted to stay close to home. Bill offered him a walk on spot and John came in and promptly got beat by most of the other guys on the team. But once a week, Bill would play John at #6 to give him a shot.

Bill would roll car tires out on to the court as serving targets. All the guys on that team had great serve placement because they were aiming at those big tires. During John’s freshman year, as he was struggling to make the line-up, Bill advised him to join the chess club “to improve his tennis.” John did and sure enough, his tennis improved. John’s freshman year, he played 6 and 7 but the following year, he was #1. He credits Bill for that.

College tennis was different in those days. Bill’s Sun Devils didn’t have the ranking yet, or the scholarship money to give, so he couldn’t necessarily recruit the high ranked players. But he figured if he recruited the best athlete he could find, he could make them great tennis players. And that is exactly what happened. Most of the tennis players at ASU were high school All-State or All-American’s in other sports. In fact, one of his players, Mike Wilkinson, was also on the ASU basketball team. But Mike found he preferred playing tennis for Bill so he quit the basketball team to focus on tennis.

As a coach, Bill would never raise his voice to his players, and he’d never make anyone do anything, but he nevertheless inspired his team to kill themselves on the court. Bill had a mantra, “if you play 25 sets a week, you will be a great college player,” so his players played 25 sets a week. In the years Bill coached ASU’s men’s team, they were consistently ranked in the top 15 in the country.

After leaving ASU in 1972, Bill was hired as the head tennis pro at the Chaparral Racquet Club in Scottsdale and held that position from 1974-84. He had a clinic for the best juniors in town, and to be a part of the elite group, you not only had to have the results in tournaments but you had to play 25 practice sets a week in order to qualify for the class. It was amazing how many kids worked that hard to be a part of his group.

During his time at the Chaparral Racquet Club, Bill coached a lot of the section's top juniors, including Karen Copeland who was one of the top players in the nation, and went on to play for Stanford and then played on the pro tour. Bill knew how to bring out the best in everyone.

During the years he lived in Scottsdale, Bill served as an official for the Fiesta Bowl Jr. Tennis Tournament (which has become Winter Nationals). He was a USPTA member for more than 25 years.

Bill was a gentle, soft spoken guy, a bit old fashioned dressed in all white with his big floppy white hat. Everyone respected him so much and he inspired so many to be better players and most importantly, to love competing. He was also one of the nicest people you could ever know. He was universally loved.

Bill passed away in 2007 after a battle with thyroid cancer. His family and friends continue to be inspired by his encouragement to "dream big," his gift of seeing and bringing out the best in everyone, and his kind and gentle heart.

In addition to being inducted into the Central Arizona Hall of Fame, Bill was inducted into the Southwest Section Hall of Fame in 2012.

Bill Lenoir was one of the United States' great tennis players and we were lucky enough to have him live, coach and play tennis here in Central Arizona for over 10 years.