

HOME-COURT ADVANTAGE

Branford boys, girls teams celebrate new tennis courts

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BRANFORD — Arguably, few sports compare to tennis. It combines the intensity of a boxing match with the elegant movements of a ballet. It requires flexibility, hand-eye coordination and smarts. And it's fun.

Better yet, it's a sport for all generations.

It's also a competitive sport, one that's dependent on not just the skill of play but on a smooth unblemished surface of play. Of all the teams in its conference, Branford High School's tennis courts were the worst. And it wasn't close.

They were cracked and pitted and degraded beyond surface repair. They were so worn down that a ball would bounce low, making the footing suspect and the home courts a less than preferable environment to train. As for matches, they barely met the minimal standards for competition, according to boys' coach Matt Frenza.

As Nancy Berdon, whose daughter plays on the girls' team, put it, "They were in hideous condition."

Enough, said Frenza. These courts do not befit a team that's regularly qualified for the state championships.

He recruited Doug Hanlon, a former RTM member and the father of a boys' team member. Hanlon signed on.

But it wasn't just the two of them.

"We went to two RTM meetings," Frenza said. "Twenty or 30 people



Contributed photo

The new tennis courts for the Branford boys and girls teams.

showed up to represent the boys' and girls' teams. We wanted to show the town how much we care about tennis."

It worked. The project, awarded to Hinding Sports Builders of West Haven, was budgeted at \$252,000 as part of Branford's five-year capital project spending plan. It involved tearing out the former courts, rebuilding the base, and installing new surfaces and equipment.

On Sept. 7, six sets of new nets stretched taut over six gleaming new surfaces.

A celebration was in order. A few weeks ago, members from the girls' and boys' teams, along with their coaches and families, gathered on the gleaming new courts. After a spirited tournament that included parents and players, the group settled down to a healthy spread. For the enjoyment of parents, champagne corks were popped.

According to girls' coach Jim Cole, the refurbished courts will not only elevate the level of play such that the girls can approach the boys' success. It's his hope

that the courts might spark interest in kids who might want to go out for tennis.

Frenza agreed. "Maybe there are some students who don't have a sport to play and they'll see the courts and will want to learn," he said. "We always have room for new kids and it's a sport you can learn to play during the first two weeks."

Not just kids. This court is open to the public.

"It's just a great game," he said. "It's a game you can play for your whole life."

— Lisa Reisman