

Coach serving more than tennis balls Bible Scriptures also are a part of kids' learning at camp

By MARGIE KENNEDY
Special to the News-Press

NORTH NAPLES – Larry Lewis, tennis director at Pelican Bay Community Park, has been teaching tennis to children and adults using a variety of techniques for more than 30 years.

But this past winter, Lewis said he decided to try something a little different.

“I’ve been in tennis a long time and I’ve always wanted to try to do more than just teach kids tennis, even adults,” Lewis said. “I want to try to relate some of the things on the tennis courts to different things in life ... I think there’s a great correlation.”

Based on this premise, Lewis decided to incorporate applicable Bible Scripture into each lesson. He took the innovative idea before the parks and recreation department and received its approval.

“The idea behind the camp is to give the kids something more than just how to hit forehand and backhand and serve,” Lewis explained. “We go through the scripture, explain it, talk about its application and then get out on the court and do it.

“We use examples of Scripture as a guide to improving sports and also life,” Lewis continued. “We try to give them some good values to work with as we’re working on the different tennis activities.”

There are four themes students work on along with their tennis game during the week-long camp: goal-setting, teamwork, dealing with anger and performing at your best.

“For example, the first day we choose a verse that relates to goal-setting and we carry that theme throughout the morning’s activities,” Lewis said, adding that students are asked to list a few goals so they get an idea of what goal-setting is all about. He said kids generally write both short- and long-term goals that sometimes extend beyond tennis to include planned achievements in life.

“Hopefully, what comes across is that kids come out of it with the thought, ‘Gee, I need to set goals for myself in different things if I hope to accomplish them,’” Lewis said. “It’s constantly reinforcing the idea that you need to have a direction – you need to know what you’re trying to do and where you’re heading.

“If you can learn to relax on the tennis court in competition, then it’s a little easier for you to relax in stress situations in your life,” Lewis said. “And a lot of times you can apply these principles to other areas of your life.”

When Naples resident Judith Shipley heard about the tennis camp, she had no qualms about letting her daughter, Tara, 12, participate. “Any positive influence children receive from an adult, I think, has an impact on them” said Shipley. “The principles he’s teaching them on the tennis courts may be the same principles used in a boardroom 20 years from now.”

Tara, a seventh grader at Evangelical Christian School in Fort Myers, said she likes combining tennis and Bible lessons. Besides working on her serve, forehand and backhand while playing games such as King and Queen of the Court, Tara said she likes the course “because you should know the Bible.”

Tara, who plans to be a teacher, veterinarian, brain surgeon or tennis pro when she grows up, said the camp is “really cool.”