

Richard "Dick" Johnson is a legend in New Mexico tennis, a lifelong coach and player whose influence has shaped the sport for over six decades. From his early days as a winning college athlete to his celebrated career as a high school coach and mentor, Johnson's legacy is defined by his unwavering passion, exceptional work ethic, and a deep commitment to the community.

A Career Built on Passion and Excellence

A native of Kansas City, Missouri, Johnson's family moved to Albuquerque in 1948. He was introduced to tennis at Rio Grande High School and quickly excelled, lettering in both tennis and basketball. At the **University of Albuquerque**, he became the winningest tennis player in school history with 43 match wins and was twice named Athlete of the Year. In 1967, at just 23, Johnson became the youngest college head coach in the country, leading the U of A Dons.

Throughout his professional career, Johnson held numerous prestigious positions, from a teaching pro at exclusive clubs to Director of Tennis at high-profile resorts, including the Rod Laver-Roy Emerson tennis facility in California. He even gave lessons to celebrities like Charlton Heston and Kenny Rogers, and coached an exhibition match between tennis icons Billie Jean King and Evonne Goolagong Cawley.

Building a Legacy in New Mexico

While his career took him across the country, Johnson's most significant impact was made in his home state of New Mexico. For **33 years**, he served as the head tennis coach at La Cueva High School, amassing a remarkable **406-59 dual match record**, which ranks him #1 in New Mexico and #14 nationally. Under his leadership, the program won **13 state championships**, with an impressive run of five consecutive boys' titles from 2019 to 2024.

Johnson's dedication to youth tennis is unparalleled. He was a pioneer in establishing middle school tennis programs in Albuquerque and founded the Dick Johnson Junior Tennis Academy, which consistently produced champions. His efforts earned him a plethora of accolades, including multiple **USPTA Southwest District Coach of the Year** awards and the **2016 USPTA National High School Coach of the Year**—the first time a New Mexico coach had ever won the national honor.

A Community Pillar

Beyond his coaching records, Johnson's legacy is his profound impact on the lives of his players and the broader tennis community. He served on the board of the New Mexico District Tennis Association for over 31 years and was a key figure in community events, from "Toys for Tots" tournaments to "Rally in the Alley," which raises money for cancer research. His reputation as

"the Godfather of youth tennis" is a testament to his tireless efforts and commitment to growing the sport.

Inducted into the **Southwest Section of the USTA Tennis Hall of Fame** in 2008 and the **New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame** in 2017, Johnson's career is a testament to the power of a single individual to shape an entire community. As he retires, his enduring influence can be felt in the thousands of players he mentored and the thriving tennis programs he helped build.