Head ski visionary also influenced the game of tennis

By Bill Simons, Inside Tennis

It’s easy to dismiss New Jersey as some kind of Turnpike ride gone wrong (with too many Sopranos, oil refineries and Jersey Shore types). But before you do, remember this place is some kind of magnet for whizzes. Think Thomas Edison – the greatest inventor ever; a beloved frizzy-haired fellow named Einstein; and then there’s a lesser-known bald guy named Howard Head, who transformed the sport of tennis as much as anyone.

In 1976, Head, an inspired innovator who said that sports equipment always had to feel right, had already invented the laminated ski, which rendered the clumsy, old hickory skis obsolete and revolutionized the sport. But the visionary – wealthy and retired – wanted to rev up his tennis game. So he got himself a ball machine and started to blast away. Unfortunately, many of his forehands landed in the next county. Something was wrong. Something had to be done.

For starters, he bought Prince Manufacturing, which made his semi-primitive ball machine. An inspired entrepreneur, he would morph Prince into one of the iconic names in international sports. He began by tweaking the motor on a household vacuum to produce the first commercially successful tennis ball machine. That was mere prologue. Almost immediately, Head grasped that little user-resistant wood rackets were far too frustrating. They twisted too much. And then came his Eureka moment. In a hot flash, he awoke one night, realizing that rackets needed to be bigger and have a far bigger sweet spot that wasn’t exactly in the middle of the frame. Wow!

Read the whole story

Golf, kayaking part of LT Marathon Week

In addition to its many running-related events, biking and triathlon competitions, the Lake Tahoe Marathon will also offer Speed Golf as part of the Lake Tahoe Marathon Race Week, Sept. 22-26.

Speed Golf takes place Sept. 23 at the Tahoe Paradise Golf Course, 3021 Highway 50. The course is 4,000 yards. Start time is 9am before the golf-only guests tee off. Participants run the 18-hole course, a distance of approximately 4K, carrying three golf clubs of their choice. Their overall score is a combination of the stroke plus run time. Participants' times start with the first drive and ends with the last putt. Golfers should bring a fanny pack to hold balls and other items. Top five wwards are offered in the men and women's division.

Green fees are $35 when you register online and $40 via mail-in registration.

For those that would rather paddle than swing, the Lake Tahoe Marathon is also offering 5- and 10-mile kayak competitions (also scull, outriggers and canoes) Sept. 24 at the Lakeside Beach & Marina near Stateline. For the second year, Race Week will also have an event for stand-up paddle boarders with awards and windshirts.

For more information or to register (fees vary for events), call (530) 544.7095 or visit the Lake Tahoe Marathon website. The website is also home to a course map and profile and event descriptions.

St. Theresa Golf Tournament on Sept. 23

St. Theresa School is having its 17th annual Golf Tournament on Sept. 23 at 1:30pm at the Lake Tahoe Golf Course.

Cost is $125 a player which includes range balls, cart, 18 holes and dinner.

Dinner only is $35. There will also be a raffle. Tickets are available for purchase at St. Theresa school or on the day of the tournament. All proceeds benefit the school, a nonprofit organization. You may register at St. Theresa school, 1181 Lyons Ave., South Lake Tahoe or visit the website.

Share the road during Sunday's cycling event around Tahoe

Tour de Tahoe – Bike Big Blue participants will be riding clockwise around Lake Tahoe starting and finishing at the Horizon Casino Resort in Stateline on Sept. 12.

The roadways will be open and motorists are asked to share the roadway and plan a little more time to get to their destinations. Below are the highways, locations and times that bicyclists will be sharing the roadways.

Hwy 50 westbound Stateline – South Lake Tahoe 6:30-8:30am

Hwy 89 northbound South Y – Camp Rich – Emerald Bay 6:30-10.30am

Hwy 89 north bound Emerald Bay – West Shore – Homewood 7:30-11:30am

Hwy 89 north bound Homewood – Tahoe City 9:30am-1:30pm

Hwy 28 east bound Tahoe City – Kings Beach – Incline Village 9am-2:30pm

Hwy 28 east bound Incline Village – Spooner Junction 10am-4pm

Hwy 50 west bound Spooner Junction – Stateline 11am-5pm

Guy from Tahoe does more than ski, put on bike events

By Mary Cook

Curtis Fong, best known for his television and radio personality The Guy from Tahoe, is not your typical guy from Tahoe. He seems to live two lives: that of a mountain goat and that of an on-the-go urbanite.

And he's much more than the guy putting on Sunday's 8th annual Tour de Tahoe – Bike Big Blue 72-mile ride around Lake Tahoe or the guy who writes the ski report for *Lake Tahoe News* and delivers it on KTHO FM-96.1.



Curtis Fong likes fast cars, bikes and skis. Photo/Provided

Fong fell in love with Tahoe as a teenager. He learned to ski at 12. At 18, while peers were pulled into the Vietnam War, Fong “got lucky” because he received a high lottery number in the draft and went to college. After four years studying photography at Sacramento State, Fong rented a cabin in Tahoe and ran a successful photo concession at Kirkwood the year it opened in 1971. Within two winters, Fong advanced to advertising and public relations director at Kirkwood.

In 1983, Fong left Kirkwood to work for KTHO AM-590 radio in sales. He presided as station manager for its FM counterpart, K-Zephyr, until 1985. During this time, Fong took up cycling, loving it so much he and his buddies formed a club, known as the Alta Alpina Cycling Club.

The Death Ride was organized by Wayne Martin in 1980, and became the official ride in 1981. Fong functioned as the Death Ride manager for 11 years.

The Death Ride got Fong’s wheels spinning – it was his guinea pig event. He formed TGFT (The Guy from Tahoe) Productions, a sports marketing company, in 1989. Then, in 1990, he christened his company with the Comstock Silver Century, a 100-mile, 9,000-vertical-foot historical ride out of Carson City and Virginia City.

“It was meant to be a training ride for the Death Ride,” Fong stated.

As it turns out, this route was a training ride for three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond.

From there, Fong created America’s Most Beautiful Bike Ride in 1991. He also started OATBRAN, which stands for One Awesome Tour Bike Ride Across Nevada.

Now, in its 19th year, the tour follows 420 miles of Nevada’s loneliest highway, Highway 50.

Fong harbors a soft spot for untouched places, stretches of desert speckled with sagebrush, sliced by long, rolling highways. In addition to his homes in Gardnerville and Stateline, Fong owns a house with 3 acres “in the middle of nowhere,” also known as Gilman Springs, Nev. During a recent weekend at this property, he witnessed a meteor shower, spent time at the local hot springs, and trekked to nearby ghost towns with the help of his H1 Hummer.

Fong’s desire for wide-open spaces and miles of lonely highway predisposed him to a love affair with high-performance vehicles. Inevitably, about 20 years ago, Fong sided with Porsches, believing them to be “works of art.” In the winter, he does road trips to Aspen, Sun Valley, and British Columbia in pursuit of his other passion – skiing.



Porsche drivers at Sand Mountain.

Photo/Provided

(Fong also coordinates the Heavenly R.A.T.S. League Race Series and mogul freestyle events for Sierra-at-Tahoe.)

He doesn’t mind flying, but if he has the time, he loves the drive. “I like to see the country, discover new roads,” he says.

About 10 years ago, Fong became involved with the Porsche Club of America (PCA), and ever since he has been collecting Porsches. He owns everything from a 356 Speedster to a 911 Turbo, built for street and track. He attended driving school in Reno and obtained a test and tuner’s license, which allows him to buy track time at the Reno Fernley Raceway. Two years ago, Fong was the vice president of the Sierra Nevada PCA and in the same year he put on his first show-and-shine car show called Porsches in the Park.

Fong’s experience with the OATBRAN bike ride spawned the idea of a car tour across Nevada. Now, four summers in counting, Fong has led a group of Porsches across Nevada on Highway 50, culminating in a three-day, two-night tour. Last year, in August, he also took a group of Porsches around Lake Tahoe, with a lunch-stop at Northstar-at-Tahoe and dinner at Lakeside Beach Grill.

In the 1990s, Fong split time between radio and television. He started calling in to radio stations in the Bay Area to do Tahoe ski reports. One Monterey station disc jockey forgot Fong’s name during his introduction and arbitrarily dubbed him “The Guy from Tahoe.” Fong rolled with the mistake, cueing in with, “Hi, this is Curtis Fong, The Guy from Tahoe.” The nickname stuck and he still uses it to this day with his mountain resort reports on K-Tahoe, his “What’s Up Tahoe?” segments on Outside TV and with *Lake Tahoe News*.

After 39 years of living in Tahoe, the 60-year-old possesses

top-notch credibility in the area's media and recreation industries. While the lure of other places (Hawaii; Park City; Bend, and Sedona) beckoned, he stayed true to Tahoe.

"With all the friendly people, with all the recreation that is here, there is no reason for me to go anywhere else," Fong says.

Every once in a while, his ambitious nature gets the best of him; he has to remind himself to pause and gawk at the flawless sapphire that is Lake Tahoe. He encourages all Tahoe residents to do the same: "We all need to stop and say, 'Wow, this is why I'm here.'"

On Sunday, thousands of others will say something similar as they participate in his annual Bike Big Blue cycling event.

Long-distance hiker to speak at TRTA's annual dinner

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association's Annual Meeting & Volunteer Appreciation Celebration is Sept. 25 at Northstar-at-Tahoe at the Mid-Mountain Lodge.

The evening will include a silent auction, buffet-style dinner, meeting, presentation of volunteer awards and keynote speaker Adam Bradley, avid long-distance hiker/fast packer.

The meeting begins at 5pm with a silent auction and cocktail hour. After the cocktail hour, participants will have a buffet dinner, presentation of volunteer awards, and keynote speaker Adam Bradley. Space for this event is limited, so reserve a spot no later than Sept. 17.

The keynote speaker, Bradley, is a 38 year old long-distance hiker/fast packer who resides in Reno. Bradley first began long-distance hiking on Vermont's Long Trail in fall 2002. It took just that one trip to turn walking into a way of life for him. Since then, he has traversed a number of trail systems within the US including, but not limited to, the John Muir Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, Tahoe Yosemite Trail, Appalachian Trail and the Tahoe Rim Trail three times and once unsupported/unresupplied speed record.

Recently he has been dubbed an Eco Adventurer for his work with Nevada Wilderness Project on the SWIP Trip. NWP organized the SWIP Trip because they knew that the intersection of Bradley's low-impact style of hiking with an impending renewable energy transmission line offered a unique perspective through which to explore some of the issues and opportunities facing conservationists. Bradley will take the audience along on his recent journey on the Tahoe Rim Trail through a stunning video of his adventure skiing around the Tahoe Rim Trail last winter.

The cost for the annual meeting/dinner is $35 per person $60/couple through pre-registration only. Those interested in the outdoors, recreation and the Tahoe Rim Trail and Association are invited and encouraged to attend. Registration for this event is available at www.tahoerimtrail.org or call (775) 298.0012.

Boat launches, inspections shutting down around Tahoe

Lake Tahoe watercraft roadside inspection stations and public

launch facilities are preparing for the fall and winter boating season with reduced schedules.

Below are the current and proposed schedules for each location. Also click here for up-to-date inspection information.

Roadside Inspection Stations:

Spooner Summit: Closed for winter

Northstar-at-Tahoe: Open through Sept. 14

Alpine Meadows Road: Open through Sept. 29

Meyers: Open through Sept. 29. This site will remain open through the winter only for decontaminations by appointment and to test new, upgraded boat washing units for increased speed and efficiency in 2011.

Public launch schedules are subject to weather and water level.

Tahoe City, Lake Forest: Open through winter

Cave Rock: Open through winter

Incline Village, Ski Beach: Open through September, by appointment after Oct. 1

Sand Harbor: Closed for winter

Tahoe Vista, National Avenue: Closed because of low water

Kings Beach, Coon Street: Did not open because of low water

South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado Beach: Did not open because of low water

Contact private facilities or marinas directly for operating hours and fee information.

Jitloff putting on tennis shoes to raise money for cancer research

By U.S. Ski Team

Alpine Olympian Tim Jitloff of Reno is back in the start this fall with his second Susan G. Komen Northern Nevada Race for the Cure on Oct. 3, an annual running race centered on raising money to find a cure for breast cancer.

Jitloff's mother, Pam, was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2007 and is now two years in remission following successful radiation treatments. His mother's experience had a profound effect on Jitloff and propelled him to a new level of awareness – a level he's driven to help grow.

"I want to have an impact in my community and help spread awareness. Being a World Cup ski racer, my community is pretty global," said Jitloff, a six-year veteran of the U.S. Ski Team and a member of the 2010 U.S. Olympic Team

"Susan G. Komen Northern Nevada is excited to be working with Tim again, especially after his tremendous success last year as the number one fundraiser for the Northern Nevada Race for the Cure," said Lucy McGuire, president of Susan G. Komen Northern Nevada. "We are thrilled that a local, as well as an international athlete, is putting together a team to help save lives and work towards a world without breast cancer."

Last fall, Jitloff raised just less than $10,000 through sponsorships of his 5K run. This year, he's set the bar at $10,000 again, but hopes to surpass it. Reno's Grand Sierra

Resort and Casino has already matched its 2009 pledge with another $5,000 and additional sponsors have brought Jitloff's current total to $7,330 with a month left to race day.

"It was an instant 'absolutely' from Grand Sierra and I've had amazing support from other returning sponsors," added Jitloff. "I've also had a number of new folks who have come on board and are excited to be a part of this, but there's still more we all can do."

In order to take the message globally, Jitloff plans to complete one run of the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup opening giant slalom in Soelden, Austria, with a specially painted Uvex helmet in support of October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The helmet will later go to auction to benefit Komen.

"I started off last year with a very basic plan to help; now I am being a bit more creative by adding some new twists to how I can have an impact. Soelden is a huge race with thousands of spectators in the stands and hundreds of thousands more watching on television across the world. It should be a cool way to kick off the season," said Jitloff.

Join Jitloff's team for the 12th annual Susan G. Komen Northern Nevada Race for the Cure. Worldwide, breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in women.

Derby Dames about to wrap-up home season

With three home bouts under their belts, the Tahoe Derby Dames will end their home season Sept. 18 when they play the Mountain Derby Girls from Sonora.

The final home bout for the Dames will again blend full-contact athletic roller derby action with philanthropy. A portion of the bout proceeds will go to support the St. Theresa Food Pantry, which recently announced its cupboards were bare. The Dames will also have a canned food drive at the bout, providing a free raffle ticket for every two cans donated to the cause.



The Tahoe Derby Dames last home bout is Sept. 18. Photo/Austin Fay

As always, the bout will feature a beer garden, half-time show and a raffle, along with ample opportunity to cheer on your favorite derby girls.

Bout tickets are $10, and kids under 10 are free. Tickets can be purchased from any derby girl, at Brothers Bar & Grill, or at the event. Gates at Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe open at 3pm and the roller derby bout kicks off at 4pm.

For more information, visit the Dames online.

Women’s-only backpacking course

If you’ve wanted to try backpacking, join the TRTA for the Women’s Backpacking 101 course.

Led by volunteer Tahoe Rim Trail Associaton guides and experienced backpackers Ellen Goldsmith and Sue Henson, this class will introduce the basics of backpacking, trip planning, how to pack, bear awareness, campsite selection and set up, meal preparation and Leave No Trace principles.

Beginning backpackers are welcome, but should be able to hike at elevation with a 20-30 pound backpack. Participants must provide their own gear, food and clothing. Gear can be rented for a small fee from the TRTA or outdoor stores, such as REI. A gear list will be sent to participants.

This course will start with a review of participant gear. The guides will assist in fitting participants with their packs for best performance. Participants will follow the Tahoe Rim Trail through Big Meadows toward the western shore of Dardanelles Lake for an overnight camp. The total mileage for two days is 8 miles.

Dates-times: 10am Sept. 18-2pm Setp. 19

Meeting place: Big Meadows Trailhead

Cost: Free

For more information, and for prerequisites for this course, call the TRTA office at (775) 298.0238 or email programs@tahoerimtrail.org.