Running Clubs: Fun and Fellowship in Speed Shoes

THURSDAY, JULY 29, 1976



Workaday Life of the ennis Pro

By Eric Siegel

LMOST every hacker longs secretly to be a tennis pro. And why not? To be outside in the fresh air all day, playing the game you love for \$16 an hour and up, nurturing future top-flight players who'll take time to thank you by name in post-match interviews on national TV -that must be the life.

But is it the life of a tennis pro?
Not exactly. You would more likely find yourself giving your seventh onefind yourself giving your seventh one-hour lesson on a steamy summer aft-ernoon to an overweight, inattentive middle-aged housewife who has never before donned tennis shoes, let alone held a racket; or playing family coun-selor to a distraught mother between hints on improving her backhand; or feeling the stony silence of your stu-dent's husband who is certain you are calling to set up a tryst.

calling to set up a tryst.

Allie Ritzenberg remembers the struggle to get pupils when he first started teaching a quarter of a cen-

tury ago.
"We'd go cown and we'd teach at

the 'Y' and we'd teach at the Jewish Community Center and everywhere," he says. "People were paying \$1.50 a lesson and they'd want blood. There might have been 20 people in the class and each one wanted to know why you weren't paying more attention to them and what your qualifications were for teaching. For a buck and a

Ritzenberg, of course, no longer has to struggle for pupils. As the teaching pro at St. Albans, where some of the city's most influential people play, Ritzenberg has people lining up to pay him \$32 an hour for lessons.

"Nobody, ever, is as demanding now" as in those group lessons 25 years ago, Ritzenberg says. "Now, if you want to, you discuss politics and you talk. And if you get around to tennis you do tennis."

While Ritzenberg's own success has made life more pleasant, it has also created its own special demands.

a long time, you get calls on every-

'When you've been in the business

thing," he says. "Someone wants advice about a court, someone else wants advice about a tennis investment. . . I've even had people call up and say, 'I'm doing a crossword puzzle and there's a question here on tennis.

Ritzenberg's job encompasses much more than just teaching tennis. On any given day it may range from choosing an architect to design the pro shop to selecting the prizes for the annual club tournament. Still, he gives as many as seven hours of lessons a day, beginning as early as 6:30

Ritzenberg says the major challenges for a pro is bringing out the best in his students.

"Four years ago, Gene McCarthy-was taking a lesson," Ritzenberg says, "and he said, 'You know you should be the vice president. A tennis pro should be the vice president because he makes you look much better than you really are.'

"Anybody can teach a talented per-

son," Ritzenberg adds. "The real challenge is to take people who are not talented and make good tennis players out of them."

"People learn in different ways. Some learn through their intellect. Then it's a matter of being articulate as well as knowing the game. Others learn strictly through imitation. Therefore, you have to have a game which they can copy.

"I always said if a player wasn't a very fine tennis player that it must be my fault. Since then, I've learned there are people with neuroses and psychoses and all kinds of hangups who fight you and might not try what you're telling them to do."

Pauline Betz Addie is the area's best known woman teaching pro. Once the winner of Wimbledon, thrice the winner of Forest Hills, author and lecturer, she has been teaching tennis for some 30 years. And, like Ritzenberg, she finds the life has changed since she started.

"All of us-and by all of us I mean

everybody in my age group-used to think nothing about knocking off 20 lessons in a day," she says. "But now we're older or richer or something. We don't teach nearly as much." Then, too, she says, "Once you get a

reputation as a teacher, people think if they don't improve it's their fault. And usually it is. Usually it's because they haven't worked on it." Now, Addie teaches four to five hours a day in winter, seven days a

week; somewhat fewer in summer, when she runs her children's tennis camp at Sidwell Friends.

"The first thing I ask anybody who's taking a lesson is, 'Do you want to work on anything in particular?" she says. "Then I ask, 'What is your objective in taking lessons?'

"I had a fellow who said he just wanted to get worse more slowly. He knew he was getting old and getting worse and he just wanted to decelerate the process.

See TENNIS, G10, Col.1

The Fastest Rope in the West (Probably)



By Denis Collins

E DOESN'T want to dwell on it, not with so many more important things to say. But Bobby Hinds, 49, will continue to regard himself as the speed rope jumping champion of the United States. Even if some 12-year-old kid did win the official title last January in Bloomer, Wis.

"He did 59 revolutions (in 10 seconds) and I did 61," said the 6-foot, 225pound Hinds, who was disqualified for taking just one jump for every two skips of his rope. The judges fur-ther ruled that his rope, the Lifeline, had an unfair weight advantage because of its construction.

The Lifeline is something Hinds will dwell on. A nine-foot length of nylon cord strung with plastic links, it looks like a strand of beaded curtain from some Singapore opium den. It sells for \$4.95. That includes an instruction booklet in case you forgot how to

"It's virtually indestructible ... prefectly balanced and has no lag time," said Hinds from the depths of the suite in the Washington Hilton where he was hyping his product this week.

"The handles have been specially 'designed to give you that true ball bearing effect." And the weight of the plastic vertabrae along the rope allows you to "jump outside in a gale." Those burdened with more conventional jump ropes apparently cannot jump during gales.

If you gave up jumping rope when the clothesline frayed and you forgot the 25th verse of "Put the piggy in the well," Hinds' Lifeline may seem needlessly sophisticated. But Hinds is selling health as well as jump ropes, hoping the two will form a symbiotic link.

"It's the greatest cardiovascular exercise known today," he said, whipping off a breathless series of crossjumps, double crossovers and some-thing called "the matador" until his rope whanged the overhead light fix-ture. He cited an article in Research Quarterly that says jumping rope for 10 minutes is equivalent to jogging for half an hour.

"I do this because I really belive in it. If you've got something to say, you've got to get people to listen." Hinds is a master at getting people to listen. Since developing the Life-line in his basement three years ago, Hinds has been on the Johnny Carson Show, on To Tell the Truth and on Bozo the Clown ("that's a biggie in

He's had a dozen newspaper features written about him, Sen. William Proxmire, D-Wis., once praised him in the Congressional Record, and he's now on the back of every box of Wheaties sold in the U.S.A.

That's quite a bit of exposure for a big guy skipping rope. He's been so successful, he says, because he knows how to sell ("In 1973 I was the largest writer of life insurance in the United States") and because he knows the kinds of angles that appeal to the media, "things they can hang a story on."

Two weeks ago in Chicago, Hinds took on all jumpers along State Street, giving away Lifelines to anybody who could stay with him for two minutes. He got Bobby Riggs to bet, and lose, \$100 in a handicapped rope jumping contest with the bet donated to the

Heart Fund. But his best "selling gimmick" is a. life story that sounds like it was written for Marlon Brando.

A wayward youth, Hinds was sent

up river when he was caught aiding in armed robbery at 13. But he learned to box in the slammer and it gave him new purpose. Golden Gloves championships fol-

lowed, he says, and he went on to the University of Wisconsin where he was twice NCAA runnerup as a boxer. He taught art for a short time, then went on to success in the insurance business and finally invented his Lifeline. This week he was sharing a suite

with a Chicago group called Sales Motivation, which was representing Hinds' jump rope along with substances called "Deamon Deb", "Cocrema" and four or five other Beauty products.

"They think I've got a hot item," said Hinds of the Sales Motivation people. "But there are a lot of people trying to copy this rope. Those guys in Taiwan... they respect nothing.

"But they've got a cheap product. Mine is a good one. Who knows, I might make millions."

Hash House Hijinks



If, as happens rarely, the hare is caught before he finishes laying the trail, the rules say he can be stripped naked and left to fend for himself. However, this practice is not observed in Washington and its suburbs.

The chase ends where it began, or at the hare's home, or at a nearby watering hole where, by tradition, the hare provides beer or other alcoholic refreshment. Hashmen consider beerdrinking no less important than run-ning; indeed, for many the chase

serves mainly to work up a thirst.

Launched in 1972, the Washington club is the oldest of four U. S. chapters of the Hash House Harriers International, which had its origins among expatriates in Malaysia in 1938. Legend has it that an Australian in Kuala Lumpur named A.S. Gispert began jogging on Monday nights to sweat off the excesses of preceding weekends. He was joined by friends also seeking to "taking the curse off Mondays," as Hashmen put it, and the group repaired to a local bar known as the Hash House following their runs. As the runners began exploring different routes around the Malaysian countryside, the Hash House's enterprising

proprietor arranged to meet them at the finish line with a beer wagon. Overcome by his gesture, the Harriers

named their organization for his bar.
Gispert died in the Battle of Singapore, but the club was revived after
World War II by another Australian,
who successfully claimed war reparations to replace 24 missing beer mugs

and the club's battered bugie. One member started an affiliated club in Singapore in 1962, and other branches quickly followed. There are currently 78 Hash chapters, most in Asia and in former British colonies elsewhere in the world.

The World.

The Washington Hash, which celebrated its 200th weekly run July 17, was begun by Bill Panton, a World Bank agronomist who had been a member of the "Mother Hash" in Kuala Lumpur. Panton collected five friends for the first event. Since then the club has spread through Washington's international community. It now has 75 dues-paying members, about 20 of whom work for the World Bank or International Monetary Fund. Other members include doctors, lawyers, stockbrokers, military officers, and a variety of government and embassy officials. Americans, British, Australians, New Zealanders, Europeans, Scandinavians, South Africans and Rhodesians are among the nationali-

ties represented. Several foreign members of the Washington Hash posess diplomatic immunity, a circumstance which has proven useful on more than one occasion. For example, there was the time an inspired hare laid a trail through the National Zoo after closing hours. As the Park Police closed in on the hounds, the Americans in the pack, invoking emergency proceedures, sprinted for cover, leaving the diplomats behind to negotiate with the law. "We all started speaking Hungarian," one Hash member recalled.

Each week members receive a circular containing directions to the next event, a "reHash" of the previous meeting and a compendium of offcolor jokes and trivia ("Hash Trash"). Each member is expected to serve periodically as hare, laying the trail and providing post-race refreshments for the 30-odd hashmen likely to show up

for a meeting,

I was invited to run with the Washington Hash this spring on the occasion of the club's annual general meeting. It was a warm June evening as we gathered on Jones Mill Road in the Maple Wood section of Bethesda, a motley collectionn of serious runners in track garb, dilettantes in Bermuda shorts, and cautious types in trousers or sweatpants. Poison ivy, it seems, is the scourge of Hashmen.

After some desultory conversation. someone shouted "On, on!" and the pack loped off across a meadow toward Rock Creek. The trail crossed the stream on a steel beam placed there for some forgotten purpose, and the chase immediately slowed as runners stepped gingerly-or crawled-

across the narrow passage.
On the other side of the stream, the trail followed Rock Creek for a few yards, crossed over and then under

the Beltway before leading into the Forest Glen section of Bethesda. A check placed on a B & O Railroad crossing enabled us laggards to catch up with the leaders. Someone found the trail along the tracks, shouted "On on!" and we were off running along the railroad bed into Forest Glen. The trail then proceeded through a confusing maze of suburban streets, all of which looked vaguely alike. I had no idea where I was, but I followed the flour spots and the shouts and was grateful for the checks, which ena-bled me to rest my sweat-drenched body.

As the miles added up, I began to fancy myself one of the leaders. When we returned to Rock Creek, however, a clever "back check" left a group of us wandering around a field with no trail in sight. When the trail was found again, it proved to be on the opposite side of the stream, leaving us the choice of soaking our shoes or falling hopelessly behind the new leaders. I chose the long way round.

The trail finally ended at the home of Bill Panton, the founder, who was waiting in his yard with a keg of beer and snacks. As twilight faded into dusk, we went inside to a curry feast prepared by Bill's Malaysian wife and three daughters. The annual meeting followed, a raucus affair punctuated with wisecracks and ribaldry. To lead the club, members chose Jack Ran-

dolph, an international trade specialist with the Commerce Department, and Tony Reeve, a British Embassy staffer, as Joint Masters (co-presidents); Graham Perrett, an Australian accountant with the International Monetary Fund, Honorable Secretary; and Jack Scott, a Washington real estate agent, Honorable Treasurer. Another American, Jim de Rocker, was chosen Master of the Hash Horn (keeper of a bugle used to muster the

As might be suspected, the Hash is a resolutely male chauvinist organization. Club rules prohibit gambling, opium smoking and "the introduction of females and bad characters on runs." The occasional member's wife who shows up dressed to run has traditinally been greeted with stony stares.

Beyond the prohibition against females, qualifications for membership remain vague and undefined. The ideal Hashman is physically fit, enthusiastic about running but not fanatically competitive, and adept at "good commradship, especially during the post-run grog sessions, which are the main forum for Hash social inter-

But the club's motto says it best!"If you have half a mind to join the Hash," the saying goes, "that's all you need."







For former school runners, a club team revives the pleasures of school sports without the pressures; for others it's a form of redemption, an unlooked for blessing of middle age.

CLUBS, From G9

For one-time high school and college cross-country runners, membership on a club team revivies the remembered pleasures of school sports with none of the pressures. For those who never liked sports in school or never considered themselves athletic, joining a running team is a form of re-demption, an unlooked-for blessing of middle age.

The most high-powered of the current teams is the Washington Running Club, which has traditionally attracted the top distance runners of the area. The Washington Running Club and its antecedent organizations have won national AAU team championships at distances ranging from 25 kilometers to 50 miles. Two WRC members, Phil Stewart and Bruce Robinson, competed in the U.S. Olympic marathon trials in Eugene, Ore. in

Each year the club sends a three-member team to the 36-mile Twin Bridges Race in Scotland. To support its members' travels, the WRC is constantly raising money through garage sales, bake sales, teeshirt sales and the

Because of its competitive success, Because of its competitive success, the WRC has acquired—unfairly, members say—an elitist image. "We're trying to get away from that," says Stewart. "We haven't done much recruiting for a while, but we'll take anyone who shows up."

The 40-member WRC has several

sub-groups, including members strictly interested in track events; "masters" (over-40) runners; and a handful of women. Several members train together under Norm Brand, a Civil Service Commission official who serves as the club's manager and

But the tone of the club is set by its premier runners in their 20s and early 30s. They include teachers, a publisher's representative, local government workers, a running shoe salesman, and several graduate students.

At least two other running teams

Fellowship for the Long Distance Runner are challenging the dominance of the Washington Running Club. The most **Finding Your Fellow Runners**

recent is the D.C. Metro Track Club, which was formed last winter by a group of runners who had known each other at West Springfield High School and recruited other young runners in the area.

Because its 15 members are young and single, D.C. Metro may be the most closely knit of any of the local teams. Members work out twice a week on a local track and travel to races together. Club members often meet early Sunday morning ride for an hour or more to Prince William Forest or to Catoctin, Md., run several miles, stop at a restaurant, and arrive back home in the late afternoon.

'Most of your runners stop once they get out of college," says Mark Baldino, club organizer. "But we thought we had something too good

In serious competition, the Washington Running Club -and now D.C. Metro—are shoo ins for the top prizes, yet new running teams are forming all the time. A principal force behind this phenomenon is Dave Theall, an HEW management analyst who with Jeff Darman founded the D.C. Harriers in 1972. Theall believes running clubs provide worthwhile experiences that transcend talent or its absence, and has convinced other runners to organize clubs similar to the Harriers.

Dave and I wanted something special—talent plus sympatico, or what-ever you want to call it," recalls Dar-man, who recently retired as Harriers president. "In 1972 the Washington Sports Club had over 30 people and all the top runners. We had only seven members to start; but we wanted it that way. We take in new members only once a year. Because we've grown solowly, everyone knows everyone else. If we have 'stars'-and we do -it's because they have develFor most hobby runners, running stops being a solo sport when the urge for competition sets in. Many in the patients: there's a level of competition Washington area begin as casual joggers, often on diet or coronary pro-

grams, but soon begin to wonder just how good they are compared to others of their same age and condition.

When that time comes, the place to go is the D.C. Road Runners, largest of he area's running clubs, and sponsoring organization for most of the com-petitive running events in the Wash-

ngton area. The Road Runners hold weekly races at various locations in the area most weekends during the year, and

anyone can and does show up. Old

or handicapping for anyone. The club encourages participation by every-body and exists first and foremost to get runners together in low-pressure competition.

Road Runner events are also a place to meet other runners, including the members of smaller clubs you might want to join.

For information on Road Runner events, check Sports II's Roster section weekly or call Lt. Col. John Davenport (697-8391 or 434-0682) or Steve Clapp (833-1730 or 484-8664).

oped into stars, not because we re-cruited the best runners."

The Harriers now have more than two dozen members, including lawyers, bureaucrats and public relations men connected with the Justice, Labor and HEW Departments, the CIA, and NASA. The club also includes one or two Hill staffers, an American University professor, a physical therapist and a Virginia circuit judge. The Harriers recently took in three women—a doctor's wife and two Justice Depart-

ment staffers. The Harriers keep busy with periodic group runs, an annual club cham-plonship and picnic, an annual ban-quet, a New Year's Eve run and party, and a newsletter. In the fall the team has a full schedule of races against area college cross-country teams. Groups of Harriers frequently journey together to distant marathons or other long-distance races.

Two relatively new clubs, the Belt-

way Striders and the Capitol Hill Pacers were formed on the Harriers model with Theall's encouragement.

The Striders were started early last year by Paul Naylor, an Army major, and a handful of running acquaintances, and quickly instututed the monthly breakfast runs that have become the team's trademark. The club meets on a Sunday morning at a member's house for a leisurly run followed by breakfast cooked by the host's long-suffering wife or roommate. The breakfast runs have served to hold the club together during a period of rapid growth and turnover. Th Striders now have a fixed membership of 30; new members are added as old members leave the area.

The club counts among its members several military officers and enlisted men, a Secret Service agent, several government lawyers and bureaucrats, two journalists, an airline pilot and an artist. Valerie Nye recently joined her husband Peter and son Trevor, 11, to become the club's lone woman mem-

The Capitol Hill Pacers originated last fall with Gary Ceponis, an FBI data processor and nine other runners he collected. The charter members brought in their friends, and the club had grown to 25 members by spring. Members include several lawyers, FBI and EPA employees, a college teacher, a building engineer and a fire chief. The Pacers have five women members. The club tries to get together at least once a month at a race or an informal workout.

The Bad News Bears of the Washington running scene are Health's Angels, a jogging club at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that has begun sending teams to local races. The Angels began last fall when a handful of HIH joggers placed an ad in an agency

other joggers.
"We had a flood of responses," recalls Al Lewis, a hepatitis researcher who serves as club treasurer. "We now have 60 members, about half of

whom are serious about running."
The NIH group considered calling themselves "Rodent Runners" but abandoned that notion in favor of their chosen emblem: a laboratory rabbit sporting a halo and wings. The Angels teeshirts peddle their teeshirts to receptive buyers in other states and even in Europe as they travel about on business, Lewis reports.

The Angels make no pretense of being a threat as yet in team competition. The 5-foot-9, 175-pound Lewis persists in racing long distances despite what he describes as a body that should be on an offensive line rather than a marathon starting line." Other club officers include a physical biolo-gist, a computer programmer and a

comparative pathologist.

The Angels sponsor a run at noon

on Fridays around the NIH campus in Bethesda and hold informal lunch hour workouts the rest of the week.

A special category of running club is the Potomac Valley Senior Track Club, a 140-member organization limited to men and women over 30 and their families. Some PVS members are also members of smaller clubs, and divide their loyalties by competing for the PVS in track events and for another club in longer road races.
One example is Gynn Wood, an American University professor who has set world age-group records in the mile.
Wood runs track events for PVS and distance races for the D.C. Harrier distance races for the D.C. Harriers.

PVS was founded in 1973 by Ed Barron, a CIA economist, and Ray Gordon, a retired oceanographer who was a champion miler in the 1940s. Barron and Gordon wanted a club that would focus attention on older runners, providing them with age-group competition and special recognition. :

Last year PVS instituted bi-weekly developmental track meets for persons over 30 and their families. (Some 15 club members are women.) These meets, which feature races at distances ranging from 100 yards to two miles, provide the principal excuse for members to get together during the spring and summer months.

Another unique club is the Capitol Walkers, which provides a home for about 20 Olympic style race walkers, some eight of whom are women. Organized by Sal Corallo, a program evaluator for the Office of Education, the club fields competitive race-walk-ing teams, sponsors races in which members can compete, and provides developmental activities to promote the sport.

"Those who take up race walking are very loyal to it," observes Corallo, acknowleging that the stiff-gaited walkers seem strange even to run-ners, with whom they share tracks. and road courses. "It's a fun thing, and it's different."

Tennis Pro

TENNIS, From G9

Addie's one-to-one relationship with her students often leads them to ask her for advice on more than their backhands.
"I've always said there are a lot of

my pupils I should be charging both tennis and psychiatric fees," she says. "Sometimes we might come to the net in the middle of a lesson, chat a little about problems with the kids, then go back and hit a few balls."

For some, the lessons themselves can be therapeutic. "I have a woman I've taught for 21 years," Addie says. "If it rains on her afternoon, she calls first thing the next morning and says. I have to change someone around so she can have her lesson. She exhausted everything I could teach her 10 years ago. But she still likes to hit

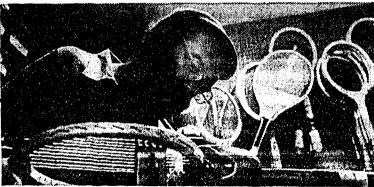
Addie gets a steady stream of wives who can't learn from their their husbands and children who couldn't

learn from their parents.
"The emotional involvement is of-

ten too much to teach a member of your family," she says. "You expect too much, you want too much. I know I have the utmost patience with anyone in the world except my own children. Inside of five minutes, you're all

"I like either a dead beginner, where you can see the progress very quickly, or someone with a definite problem. That's sort of like a doctor

stumbling on an interesting disease. "I remember I had one woman who



By Bob Burchette, The Washington Post

John Irwin: stringing rackets, selling wristbands and sweeping up.

screaming back and forth as if the kid's missing his backhand deliberately, just to spite you." Such crises notwithstanding, Addie

admits the job can get boring at times. "The most boring lesson is someone with pretty good strokes who wants to get better and you're trying in vain to think of some way for him to get better when the best thing for him would be to play better competition," she just couldn't pivot. She had a very closed stance hitting a forehand. I finally had her hit almost facing the

"She was one who looked hopeless but ended up being a pretty decent player. Every once in a while she'd call me in deep distress and say, 'I can't hit it! I can't hit it!' And I'd bring her in and straighten her out again until the next time."

Addie tells the stock story about the

player who comes in for lessons because he's constantly losing to his partner 6-3,6-3. The pro begins to correct his deficiencies and he goes out and loses 6-1,6-1. He then drops his lessons and goes back to doing what he did before, happy to be losing again 6-

3, 6-3.

"Most of the time when you start undergoing a little change you're going to get worse before you get better." she says.

John Irwin, 32, is a former junior high school science teacher who played tennis competitively in high school and college and began his teaching career running summer tournaments for Prince George's County. Four years ago, he became head pro at the GSI-run public courts at 16th and Kennedy Sts., N.W.

"People here maybe work a little harder during their lessons than people at a country club because they have less money and want to get their money's worth," Irwin says.

"I teach a lot of government workers who say, 'Gee, I wish I could get out and enjoy myself in my work like you do in yours.' My first thought is, 'Gee, there's a lot of work to this job, just like there is to any other.' It can be hard work just standing out there. Your legs get tired.

"And there's some routine to teaching. Even though the game is very intricate, sometimes you feel like you're just going over the same ground all

the time. Most of my students are beginners. A lot of them ask me: 'Can you teach a klutz?"

Irwin says he has noticed a difference between men and women students. "For some reason, I think it's easier for women to take instruction," he says. "Men want to be more self-reliant. They want to learn as much as they can themselves."

But a few women provide problems of a different sort. "Some are looking to get involved off the court," says Irwin. "If a tennis instructor looks good in tennis clothes and enjoys what he's doing, that gives him some kind of romantic image."

The image, says Irwin, is something less than accurate ("When you came in, I was sweeping up"), but even when romance doesn't figure, some women necessitate a certain amount of tact.

"Whenever I call up a woman about a lesson, I always give my name right away," Irwin says. "I'm used to just saying, 'Is so and so there?" But I know some husbands get jealous—I can just-tell from the sound of their voice. So I'll always say, 'My name is John Irwin' and I might even say something about tennis, just so they'll know I'm not a mysterious lover."

Some students, regardless of their sex, can prove baffling.

"I've got one character I give lessons to, he's about 45," Irwin says. "He doesn't want me to say anything to him, he wants me to play with him.

"The funny thing is, I always serve. He never serves. He doesn't want me to see his serve because he's embarrassed about it.

"I had a woman who did the same thing. She wanted to hit. I started to work on her strokes and she said she didn't want to work on her strokes. She just wanted to hit. I could have made her twice as good as she was but she didn't want that."

As the pro at the area's best-known public courts, Irwin often receives special requests.
"We're listed in Tennis for Travel-

ers and a lot of times people in town for three or four days will call up and try to find someone to play with," Irwin says. "It's tough, because you haven't seen them play. So you try and ask all the questions you can: 'How's your backhand?' 'Do you have a backhand?' Usually, we'll try and call somebody or look and see if there's somebody out on the courts."

Then there are the kids who want to buy a wrist band, but only a blue wrist band; and the rackets that need to be strung on the spot—as many as 50 a week when the pros are in town for the Washington Star tournament. This on top of a teaching schedule of 30 hours a week.

All of which leaves Irwin little time to do the kinds of things you might expect tennis pros to do. Like play tennis.

"I'm lucky," he says, "to play once a