

THE GUY ON THE WALL

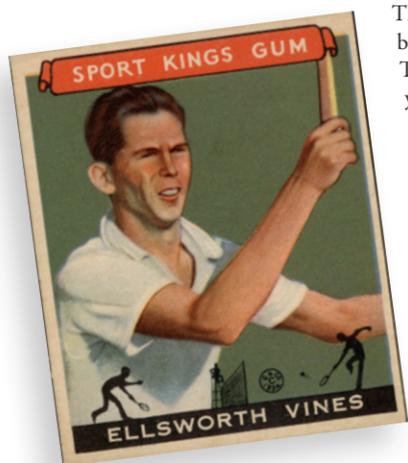
LEARN THE STORY BEHIND ONE OF THE GREATEST TENNIS PLAYERS OF ALL TIME — AND WHY LA QUINTA RESORT & CLUB WANTS US TO REMEMBER HIM.

BY JUNE ALLAN CORRIGAN

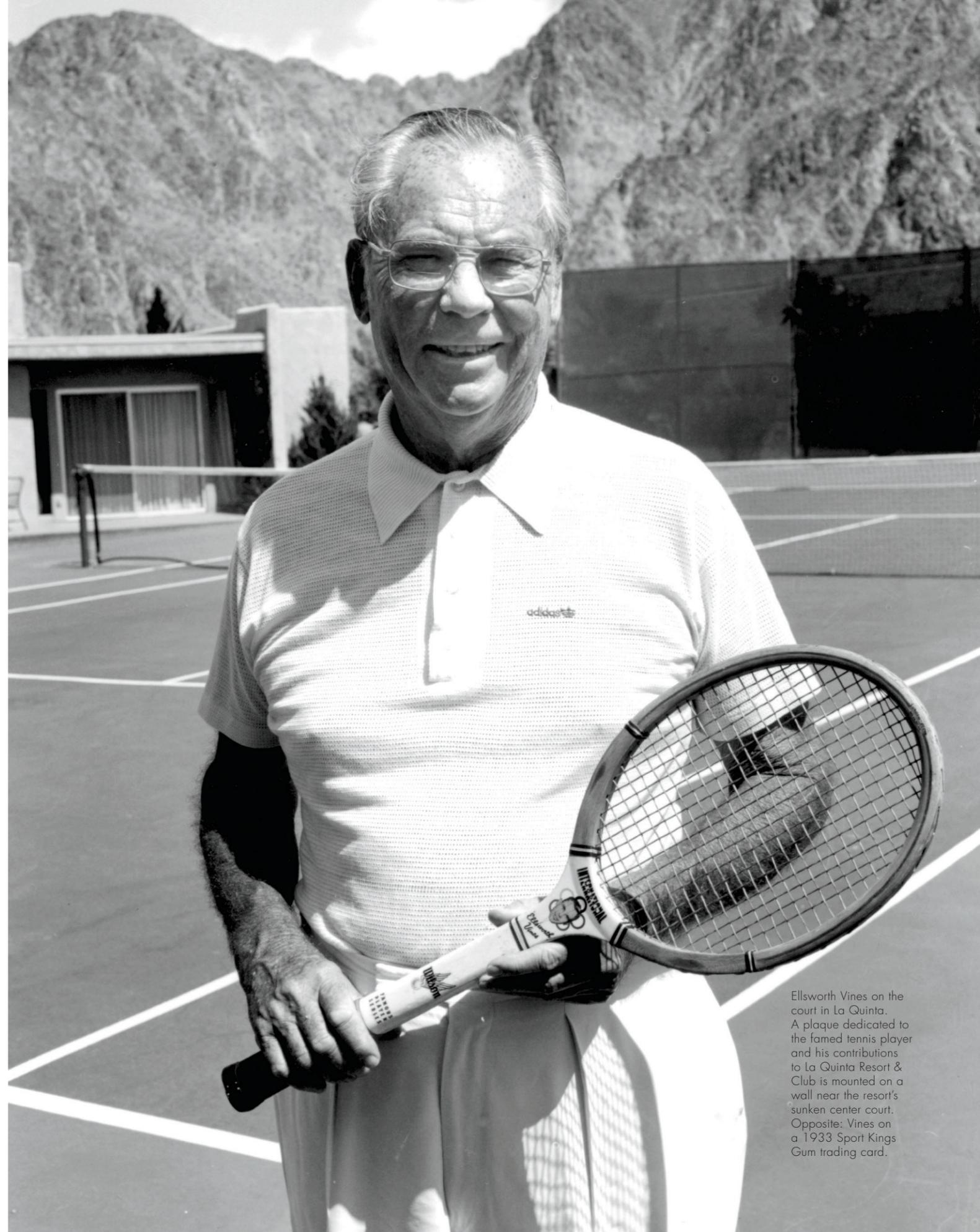
WHEN THE PACE SLOWS DOWN, you notice things ... things you might otherwise walk right on by in the midst of your harried work-filled world. During your relaxing sojourn at La Quinta Resort & Club, however, it's likely that countless property details have been appealing to your senses. The charming red clay tile roofs, the bright colors of the cascading bougainvillea, or the way the light plays off the mountains just so. Then one morning while strolling to your tennis game or lesson you happen to notice a quaint plaque embedded in a wall.

The plaque comprises 12 large shiny tiles arranged to form a rectangle. The resulting surface is hand-painted and features a border with a leaf and flower motif. "La Quinta Hotel Tennis Club," it says at the top underneath the symbol of a sprawling oak tree. Then in fanciful script below, it reads, "With respect and gratitude we proudly dedicate the Clubhouse Court to Ellsworth Vines, one of the greatest players in the history of tennis and a true friend of Landmark Land Company." All of which may leave you scratching your head and wondering, *Just who exactly is Ellsworth Vines?*

Ellsworth Vines was a tennis star in the 1930s and arguably one of the best players to dominate a court. Born in 1911, he captured the U.S. singles title at Forest Hills in 1931 and both the Wimbledon and U.S. titles in 1932 and made it to the Wimbledon finals once again in 1933. He possessed a killer serve augmented by a signature wrist snap, the likes of which nobody had ever seen. His serve was complemented by a powerful forehand, which he generally hit absolutely flat with no spin. These skills, coupled with his lanky but graceful frame and the ability to be seemingly everywhere on the court all at once, resulted in Vines being virtually unbeatable for several years running.



PALM SPRINGS LIFE ARCHIVES (ALL)



Ellsworth Vines on the court in La Quinta. A plaque dedicated to the famed tennis player and his contributions to La Quinta Resort & Club is mounted on a wall near the resort's sunken center court. Opposite: Vines on a 1933 Sport Kings Gum trading card.



Above, left: Ellsworth Vines (left) and French tennis player Henri Cochet, 1932. Above, right: Vines' talent extended beyond the tennis court; he joined the world of professional golf in his 20s and later became Vice President of Golf Operations at La Quinta Resort & Club. Opposite: Vines in 1977.

Vines' talents weren't limited to tennis. A gifted and versatile athlete, he played basketball at the University of Southern California during his freshman year, prior to his ascent in tennis. In the wake of his three Grand Slam tournament wins, he turned pro in 1934 and remained a tour de force on the professional tennis circuit for the remainder of the decade. Then, in 1940, when he was in his late 20s, he laid his tennis racket aside in favor of golf clubs. Starting in 1942 and for 15 years thereafter, he played professionally, and although he never won a Professional Golfers' Association tournament, he was frequently in contention. Twice Vines was reported to be in the top 10 for golf money winnings. No other tennis player before or since has ever made such a successful transition and competed at that high a level in another sport.

Some of Vines' other claims to fame include becoming the fourth athlete to adorn the front of a Wheaties cereal box. *Time* magazine featured him on the cover of their Aug. 1, 1932, issue. He was also inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1962 and was honored with commemorative medals noting his past championship status at special events held in later years at both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

After he retired from professional play, Vines and his wife, Verle, moved to La Quinta Country Club. During the 1980s he worked on the administrative side of golf and became Vice President of Golf Operations at the La Quinta Hotel (the original name for La Quinta

Resort & Club). At the time, Landmark Land Company, a real estate development firm, owned the property, and they dedicated the original stadium court to Vines and erected a plaque in recognition of his tennis achievements. That stadium became home to the high profile tennis tournament sponsored by Grand Marnier (now known as the BNP Paribas Open and played at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden).

The plaque has actually occupied two sites. It first resided near the original stadium court, which was ultimately removed to make way for the new spa building. Eventually, the plaque was relocated to the wall where it currently rests, on a building just west of the resort's handsome sunken tournament-style center court, built in 1981.

Lynne Rolley, Executive Director of Tennis at La Quinta Resort & Club, has dedicated her whole life to the sport. Naturally, she has long been aware of Ellsworth Vines' achievements. She's certain his legacy helped in part to make Landmark Land Company cognizant of the excellence of tennis when it was redeveloping the club in the '80s. "You always need someone to lead the way, and he came from the best of tennis players, so it's fitting the center court is dedicated to him," Rolley says. Ellsworth Vines passed away in 1994.

If you happen to find yourself in the vicinity of the sunken center court, stop for a moment to admire the plaque and its inscription. You'll appreciate it all the more now that you know the revered tennis player who lies at the heart of it. ❖

PALM SPRINGS LIFE ARCHIVES (ALL)

