

2023 Induction to the Platform Tennis Hall of Fame

Bill O'Brien

Opening Remarks by Flip Goodspeed

It's nice to be back in Chicago for the Nationals. The last time I was here was in 2018 for Brian Uihlein's induction. It's a privilege. My name is Flip Goodspeed and it's an honor to be here as we celebrate Bill O'Brien and his induction in the Platform Tennis Hall of Fame.

Induction in the Platform Tennis Hall of Fame is the highest award that can be earned in platform tennis. It is presented to individuals who have achieved distinction in the sport of platform tennis and/or who have otherwise contributed to the growth, development, and administration of the game. Recipients have also demonstrated a high level of integrity, sportsmanship, and consideration for others, thus earning the respect and admiration they deserve for their endeavors in platform tennis. I can't think of anyone who deserves this more than Bill O'Brien in terms of what he's doing for the game.

When I played in my first Charities in 1989, a long time ago, I don't believe there were any courts in Hinsdale or any leagues in that area. Today there are 13 facilities and 58 courts, which is incredible. This doesn't just happen. It takes leadership, it takes a team who loves the sport, and thousands and thousands of free lessons. Who here has taken a free lesson from Bill O'Brien? Because of Bill's energy, Hinsdale paddle blossomed. Today around 115 teams and around 1200 players in the Southwest Chicago league. As the numbers grew, Bill would add more free lessons and clinics in the evenings. All for the love of the sport. That is true giving back. When the Hall of Fame Nominating Committee met last year, we agreed there was one person who should introduce Bill O'Brien and that's another Chicago legend and close friend of Bill's, Alan Graham.

Alan Graham has been a staple in platform tennis in the Chicago area for 40 years. It was Alan's ideas, leadership, and relentless energy that led to the growth of platform tennis in Chicago. Similar to Bill, Alan taught and grew the game as a volunteer and professional. As a leader of the Chicago platform league, the membership has grown from around 850 players to around 6,000 men and 1,600 women players. By the way, that brings in something like \$400,000 to the APTA. It's pretty special. Alan also competed in Senior Nationals and he's a three-time Senior National Champion. He was inducted into the Platform Tennis Hall of Fame in 2010 for his contributions to the game. Chicago paddle would not be where it is today without the continued involvement of Alan Graham. Ladies and gentlemen, my good friend and Chicago legend Alan Graham.

Introduction Speech by Alan Graham

We are gathered here to honor a guy who has spent hours and hours of his own time for no remuneration for over 32 years. He's done one hell of a job. Bill and I ran into each other someplace and we were trying to figure out exactly how long ago we met. Neither of us could remember but we were happy we did meet. We've had a great time since we met, we've had fun, we have helped the league grow, and we've met a lot of really nice people. A lot of them are in here tonight and we thank you for coming.

In 1990, Burns Field courts were donated. Bill began to offer free lessons to the Hinsdale residents. In 1991, Hinsdale entered competitive teams in the Chicago North Shore league. In the 90s, growth of the resident participation increased, competitive league teams increased, and Bill established the Hinsdale Paddle Tennis Association to support the growth of paddle in the area.

2005 to 2010—rapid growth in participation in Hinsdale Park District. Membership rose from 100 to over 400 players, which was a big number back then.

2011 to 2019—2011 there were two facilities and seven courts; local paddle facilities grew by over 500 percent.

2022—13 facilities, 58 courts. That's pretty good. Takes a lot of time and Bill was going around to many of those giving lessons. New paddle facilities were built at the Salt Creek Club, Hinsdale Golf Club, Glen Ellyn Park District, Butterfield Country Club, Ruth Lake Country Club, Chicago Highlands Country Club, Edgewood Valley Country Club, Le Grange Country Club, River Forest Park District, Medinah, Glen Oak Country Club, and White Eagle Country Club.

2020 to 2022—Hinsdale Paddle Club membership grew by over 300 members.

in 2021, the KLM hut expanded, renovated, and was renamed the Bill O'Brien Platform Tennis Center. Over 2,000 Hinsdale area residents participate in paddle leagues. As far as leadership goes, in addition to Bill's impact on the Hinsdale area, he also contributes an equal amount of his volunteer efforts to the broader Chicago area and national paddle tennis communities.

Bill and I have overseen the CPTC (Chicago Platform Tennis Charities) for many years. In 2016, Bill created and still manages the Southwest League, a subsidiary of the CPTC. There are now 12 clubs, 115 teams, and 1200 players. Bill also runs the largest paddle tournament in the country, the Chicago Intermediate Men's Series, raising over \$20,000 in annual funding for the Chicago area charities. Bill is an ongoing expert and resource to other clubs that are building paddle facilities and to other municipalities establishing park district paddle programs. That is part of what's growing the sport here in Chicago as fast as any place in the country.

As far as national leadership, Bill has served two 6-year terms on the APTA Board, in 2005-2011 and 2013-2019. Over that time, he has served as an interim President in 2015, Vice President 2014-2018, and Secretary 2008-2011. In 2011, Bill received the APTA Service Award. Now, in recognition of all these accomplishments, Bill O'Brien is the recipient of the APTA's highest honor, induction into the Platform Tennis Hall of Fame.

I made one mistake. A major part of Bill's support comes from his wife, Betsy. Every time we had a little glitch or a big glitch in our computers and tried to get things lined up in the printer, Betsy jumped in and made it right. Betsy, we can't thank you enough.