

# Sports

## Davit has bonded with area youth for years



FROM THE PRESSBOX

STEVEN L. TIETZ

Bo Zhang took his son Wentong to the airport last week for the flight to Harvard.

It was no doubt a moment

fraught with the usual parent-child going away from home for the first time sentiments. The highly accomplished Whitefish Bay student is a state math champion, a virtuoso violinist and an avid tennis player who earned two berths to the WIAA State Individual Tournament.

In short, a typical high-achieving Blue Duke

student-athlete off to conquer the world.

And his old tennis coach, Shorewood resident Lou Davit, wishes him well.

The photo is at least nine years old. It's on the old Lake Bluff Tennis Courts in Shorewood, which are now part of softball and baseball fields. It shows Davit kneeling next to a

small and smiling Wentong, who is holding his first well-earned tennis trophy, and next to him are Sasha and Peter Velikanov, both of Shorewood, who also took lessons from Davit.

Zhang's family was originally from China while the Velikanovs came from Russia, part of the

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vast melting pot that is the North Shore. Davit, who has been teaching and coaching youth sports, particularly tennis, for decades now, remembers the moment like it was yesterday.

"Bo brought him (Wentong) to beginner youth tennis lessons at Shorewood High School," wrote Davit in an email. "Wentong loved the game. He didn't miss a lesson all summer. In June 2006, Wentong started private lessons with me at the Lake Bluff Courts in Shorewood. Peter and Sasha lived next door to the Lake Bluff courts. They also wanted to be in on the fun. They joined in on the private lessons. The kids laugh, I laugh, we all have a good time. The boys are getting bigger and bigger. Wentong gets in his first tournament and wins it (see the photo)."

A trust develops between the families and Davit. So much so that when he was small, Davit, who was entrusted to do some house-sitting for the Zhangs on their occasional visits back to China, would accompany young Wentong to regional tournaments and would also help the very small Wentong cross busy Capitol Drive.

He also, of course, took Wentong to his violin lessons. Wentong, a member of the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra as well as the State Honors Orchestra, has played at Carnegie Hall.

"Him being the math whiz that he is, showed me how math actually goes into it (playing the violin)," said Davit.

After that, life begins to move at a fast pace.



Davit's son Chris, a former two-time WIAA state D2 doubles champion at Shorewood with his partner Zach Pruitt, helps his dad with the coaching of the boys.

Along with Wentong having an accomplished tennis career at Bay, Peter Velikanov went on to play second singles and first doubles at Shorewood. He is now a student at UW-La Crosse while his brother Sasha played first singles at Shorewood as a sophomore this past season and is also, just for fun, a tournament chess player.

"They are wonderful kids, I'm glad I had the opportunity to introduce them to tennis," wrote Lou Davit.

But that's what he has been doing off and on his whole life. Davit, 85, long retired from Johnson Controls, has taught tennis and youth sports on multiple platforms for many years now.

His main goal was to keep everyone involved and having fun.

He was recreation director at Lake Bluff School for 10 years and he made a habit of carrying around with him an old tennis ball with a peace sign drawn on it.

"I'd go to the playground and see a kid who was all by himself and I'd throw the ball to him and we'd start playing catch," said Davit. "Then a short time later, another kid joins us and then another. Soon, I had to be carrying around two or three balls at a time. Some of the kids still have those balls (laughs)."

In short, the sport has been in his blood forever. He grew up in the St. Louis area but didn't play on his high school team ("I went to work everyday after school," he said) but would play in intramural tournaments in the area. In the service, he played for a Navy team while he was assigned to a mine sweeper in Charleston, South Carolina. He continued on in industrial leagues as an adult.

He isn't giving lessons right now, but has been approached to do so. He is still playing however, with a team around his age called "The Legends of the Masters."

"We still play to win," he said, "but we laugh a lot."



Submitted photo

Long-time North Shore area tennis coach Lou Davit (left) with area tennis players (from left) Wentong Zhang and Sasha and Peter Velikanov when they were young.

