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## Coach Sergio Ramos – Christian Tennis Champ

[Tyler County Booster](#), July 8, 2015, 10B

Born in Mexico, Sergio Ramos became a U.S. citizen on April 30, 1970 ... not easily or without grit.

In 2016, he will celebrate fifty years as an educator, hitting a unique milestone as one of the winningest tennis coaches in Texas history.

A long time ago in Mexico, the second child of six brothers and a sister, Sergio grew up in the riverside city of Tampico, the name meaning “water dogs” for the population of otters in the delta of the Pánuco River, ten miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. Tampico was also the heart of Mexico’s oil boom in the early 1900s, then, some say, second in production in the world.

All his family had been active in the First Baptist Church of Tampico, where his grandfather, Juan Ramos Castillo, was pastor. In all, his grandfather pastored for 52 years in Tampico, Monterey, San Luis, Valles and Madero. Sergio’s brother Homero pastored in Mexico and moved to Texas to pastor the Bonita Baptist Church in Houston at same time Dr. Milton Cunningham was pastoring in Houston.

A deadly hurricane hit while Sergio was in junior high school. They had built a two-foot brick wall around their two-story home to protect it from the river’s overflow. Only this storm was too much. Three feet of water soon turned to eight and ten feet, filling the house.

“Mother was seven months pregnant, with my youngest brother, Alcides,” said Sergio. “Daddy got a boat to get us out of the second-story window. We used a bunch of bed sheets and lowered mother into the boat.”

Rowing vigorously, they got to the street intersection where the current overwhelmed them. Sergio said, “Daddy had my brother Homer and me get out of the boat and help, one on each side paddling as Daddy rowed. But the boat turned and the current pulled me under the boat.” In a split second, as Sergio popped up on the other side of the boat, his father grabbed him by his hair and pulled him into the boat.

With his characteristic humor, Sergio said that was why he is balding today.

After a year in junior high at the American school in Tampico, Sergio accompanied his father to the U.S. to attend to their pineapple cannery business.

“Daddy did not know English well,” Sergio said.



They planted, harvested and canned sliced and crushed pineapple on three little islands off the coast and shipped it to the states for Libby's and Del Monte to label. On this trip, ten railroad reefer loads were in route to St. Louis where a strike was taking place.

"Daddy had to see to the pineapple," Sergio said. "That's why I am here in the U.S. On the way back, he felt I needed to learn English and he looked for a Christian school."

The new Valley Baptist Academy had moved from Brownsville to Harlingen under the leadership of Dr. Howard E. Gary, and Sergio and Homer became students.

"I cried every week," Sergio said. "Later, our brother Lacho came. Though all of us were homesick, Homer became the encourager."

To help make ends meet in school, Sergio hustled odd jobs like cutting hair, ironing clothes and polishing shoes: 25 cents a cut, 15 cents to press Levis, 20 cents for starched. And then he became a young banker, loaning a dollar for ten percent interest. He graduated and entered ETBC in Marshall, Texas (now ETBU), and applied for residency. After a visit home in Mexico, that application prevented his return on a student visa.

He was granted residency in 1963, transferred SFA in Nacogdoches, and earned his B.A. in 1966. He taught a year in Nacogdoches, working on his masters, and would earn his M.A., too, from SFA.

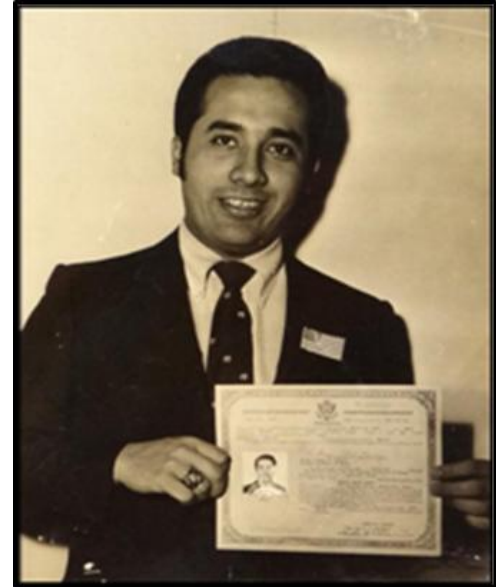
In '67, he came to Woodville to teach Spanish and became a tennis coach—and what a coach. In the following year, the SFA Baptist Student Union held a get-acquainted meeting, and Sergio was the entertainment. There, he met Susan Kane, the love of his life.

Susan recollected, "We kind of introduced ourselves. We rode around in his 1967 LeMans and talked about our families. We found out that we were taking the same History of Education class, his at 7 a.m., mine at 10."

The next morning Sergio had changed his schedule to be in the same class as her. For the next six weeks they shared a hamburger every day.

"My roommates were flabbergasted," said Susan, "that I would date a Mexican. I called him Sergio, which brought a laugh, as one questioned, 'Why do you call him "sir," do you have to walk behind him or something?' What a laugh. Like I would really call him 'Sir Joe'!"

In '68 he applied for citizenship, not wanting to marry into it. With the application in process, while taking Susan home at Midnight, Dec. 31, Sergio "ran out of gas" and,



Sergio receives his naturalization certificate, making him a full U.S. Citizen, April 1970



Sergio receives 3A State Tennis Coach of the Year from the Texas Tennis Coaches Association in 1988

offering her a ring, he proposed. They were married in July 1969.

“On my citizenship exam,” said Sergio, “you had to prove that you spoke English and knew American history and government. Federal Judge Charles Justice asked me to name the battles of the Civil War. When I went blank, he said, ‘I cannot recommend you for citizenship. You’re a teacher and should know more than the average citizen.’ I went home and studied.”

On the next interview, Sergio said, “The turkey just asked me three questions”: how many stripes on the U.S. flag, the meaning of the thirteen, and who was the current president?”

Next to marrying his sweetheart, gaining his citizenship in April of 1970 was one of the greatest days of his life. While president of the Texas Bar, Tyler County Judge Josiah Wheat keynoted the naturalization ceremony at the federal courthouse in Beaumont. Sergio had taught Wheat’s son and two daughters at Woodville HS, and Wheat gave him a signed copy of his naturalization ceremony speech.

Also in 1970, he became Woodville’s head tennis coach.

Sergio and Susan have two children, Stefanie Ramos Miller and Stephen Ramos, both delivered at Tyler County Hospital by Dr. Curtis Garner. They dote on four granddaughters Kristyn, Kaelin, Jami Miller and Reese Ramos.

In Woodville, Sergio led the high school tennis team to win district 26 years in a row! When he promoted to the education district, Woodville’s tennis missed the district finals for ten years. After coming back, they began winning district titles again, for a total of 39 district wins. And Woodville went to the state finals in 1983, ’84, ’85, ’86, ’92 and 2000.

“We lost the boys doubles state finals in 1985,” said Sergio. “I am still proud of Ronnie Ford and Glenn Sheffield who took us there. Ronnie has recently been named Spurger HS Principal and Glenn continues to work for Cameron Oil.”

Sergio won the Lloyd Sessions Educational Service Award from the U.S. Tennis Association in ’88, the Mirabeau Lamar Excellence in Teaching Award from Magnolia Lodge in Woodville in ’88, and Texas 3A Tennis Coach of the Year by the Texas Tennis Coaches Association in ’89. Also in 1989, he was selected the Outstanding Citizen of Year in Tyler County, and later



Sergio receives Lloyd Sessions Educational Merit Award from the U.S. Tennis Association



in 2008 he was selected to lead the Dogwood Festival as the Dogwood Parade Marshall.

During all these years, Sergio helped church music programs throughout Tyler County and led mission trips to Peru from First Baptist Woodville.

In 2008 he was inducted into Texas Tennis Coaches Association Hall of Fame; this with the Sessions award of '88 makes two plaques with his name at the Sports Hall of Fame across from Baylor in Waco. With two granddaughters at Baylor, one can often see Sergio wearing the Baylor colors.

Also in 2008, he became president of the Woodville Lions Club after a five-year stint as its program director, sometimes filling in with his guitar when the programs did not show.

In June of 2012, Sergio nearly died from a heart attack and went through a five-by-pass heart surgery. Susan's Facebook lit up with prayers and he pulled through, thank God.

Every year he serenades his wife Susan for her birthday. While playing his guitar at the Lions Club, near her birthday, the Lions' secretary gibed, "Well then ... are there many divorces in Mexico?" To which Sergio replied, "Not for guys with guitars."

Sharon Fuller said, "He used to sing 'Jesus Loves Me' as he drove the school bus in 1969.

Several have said he was their favorite teacher.

Kristyn Miller reflected the granddaughters' affection, "Our Poppy is patient and genuine, kind and generous.... He really does want to see all his students succeed.... One of our favorite memories from growing up is how we would always make breakfast every Saturday morning. We would crack the eggs, mix the pancake batter, and set the table. Poppy loves breakfast, and we loved this time with him. It completely marks our childhood. All in all, Poppy has poured himself into many people. It wouldn't be a long shot to say he affected at least half the county."



Friends join Sergio and Susan for his induction into the Texas Tennis Coaches Association Hall of Fame ceremony at John Newcombe Tennis Ranch in New Braunfels, Texas, 2008.

[www.TexasTennisCoaches.com/TTCA\\_Awards/HallofFame.htm](http://www.TexasTennisCoaches.com/TTCA_Awards/HallofFame.htm)