

The North Shore Weekend

"It has been said that as goes the family, so goes the world. It can also be said that as goes the father, so goes the family."
- Voddie T. Baucham Jr.

SATURDAY JUNE 17 | SUNDAY JUNE 18 2023

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SHIFTING TO A HIGHER GEAR

Winnetkan John Nichols and former professional cyclist Robbie Ventura are the formidable tandem behind the start-up Velocity, a virtual endurance-training company. pg8



NEWS

Catch the Lake Bluff History Museum Auto Show on June 24 pg10



MATERIAL PURSUITS

Our Father's Day "must-haves" include rare Cubans and other bespoke cigars at the virtual Cigora lounge and boutique pg20



SUNDAY BREAKFAST

Serial entrepreneur John Weinlader's latest venture, Volley, packs a lot of punch—and intelligence pg22

FATHER KNOWS —AND VOLLEYS—BEST

Everything's coming up aces for Wilmette's John Weinlader, a father of two and a co-founder of Volley, a revolutionary racquet sports trainer.

BY BILL MCLEAN
ILLUSTRATION BY BARRY BLITT

There might not be a North Shore 10-year-old who knows what perseverance looks like better than Emma Weinlader does.

She has watched her father, Wilmette resident and serial entrepreneur John Weinlader, embody the admirable personality trait for years. Her daddy, an avid platform tennis player, and his older brother, Dan, recently launched Volley, the first AI-enabled training experience that is backed by cutting-edge technology and delivers an on-demand, dynamic system for live play training and better workouts.

Volley is focused on racquet sports such as platform tennis, pickleball, tennis, and padel.

The formation of the family venture required three vigorous years of development and the brains and resolve of 17 engineers, including the co-founders/siblings. Iteration No. 7 of the revolutionary product materialized this year.

Volley is John Weinlader's fourth startup. "For me, one of the exciting things about being a father is noticing that Emma is understanding what it takes to devise and run a startup," says the 48-year-old Weinlader, who also has a 3-year-old daughter, June, with his wife, Molly. "There are calculated risks and blind risks with any startup.

"I don't take the responsibility of fatherhood lightly," adds the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, native who has lived in Wilmette since 2012 and is a member of the village's Michigan Shores and Westmoreland clubs. "I'd heard most parents will have spent 90 percent of their time with their children from day one until they turn 18. I'm trying my best to help our daughters grow up to be the best people possible, all while cherishing each moment with them. It has been fun and challenging."

The same could be said for the evolution of Volley, which emerged as a first-of-its-kind, smart device leveraging AI to replicate and improve real-time play for racquet-wielding beginners and elite players and everyone in between. Unlike simulator-laden golf, racquet sports hadn't had an innovation in training for 30 years. The Volley trainer can simulate any shot, including serves,

drives, lobs, volleys, overheads, screens, returns, and specialty shots.

"I became frustrated with the lack of opportunities available to practice and improve as a platform tennis player," says Weinlader, who bought the tennis ball machine line Ace Attack and then brought it to Lancaster, where he and his ardent team created a state-of-the-art performance and tennis center to build Volley. "My brother and I used an engineering mindset—question things and the best ideas will win—to create Volley, knowing that the technologies we had utilized effectively in our other startups should also work in this one."

Volley leverages vision software for ball-tracking, player-tracking, and court positioning, and even has an intelligent safety camera, Volley's site (onevolley.com) notes. Players experience workouts that provide tailored, live-play scenarios, receive video footage of their play, and gain instant access to

pro feedback.

"Lessons with pros can be helpful, but I wasn't getting enough reps during those hours," Weinlader recalls. "Volley creates opportunities for players, pros, and clubs by combining its digitally controlled ball trainer with an AI vision network, and the pro gets to spend more time instructing you on your side of the court during a lesson. Plus, if you're looking for a great workout, you'll get that with Volley."

"We're expecting Volley to be available at 8 to 10 North Shore clubs by August. We'll be like a Peloton at a hotel, in that you can use Volley at a club but can't take it home with you."

Fifteen to 20 Volley employees work in Pennsylvania, while five toil in Illinois. The product is available in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio, and New Jersey. It'll soon help enhance the games of athletes in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

Weinlader attended Manheim Township High School, home of the Blue Streaks, in Lancaster. The future engineer had a knack for either building things

or taking things apart and putting them back together again. Among his fondest memories as a child was working with his father, Keith, on Dad's blue 1965 Ford Mustang V8 with the pony-white soft top. The pair also attended car shows together. Keith Weinlader owned and operated Superior Tech Inc., a machinery manufacturer.

John Weinlader earned a degree in Engineering Sciences at Penn State University in 1997, eight years before graduating from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. Brother Dan, 53, has a PhD in Electrical Engineering.

On his first day of work for a consulting firm, John Weinlader knew within 20 minutes that he belonged in another line of work.

"I called my dad up that morning and told him, 'I don't want to do this,'" Weinlader recounts. "Dad said, 'So quit.' So that's what I did. I didn't even make it to lunch on that day. I learned the value of doing what you want to do and never hesitating to trust your instincts. My dad, with the way he established and maintained his tremendous work ethic, had such a positive influence on me, and my mother (Central Wisconsin native Barbara) was loving and caring and did a great job holding our family together."

Weinlader first met his future wife, former Northwestern University volleyball player Molly, when the two played beach volleyball doubles in Chicago one day. He stands 6-foot-6; she is 6 feet tall.

"Volleyball doubles," Weinlader says, "is a lot like platform tennis doubles. You need power, placement, and good anticipation in order to succeed in both sports."

This Father's Day, Weinlader plans to rest his busy platform tennis paddle and relax with his family, probably at the pool.

"It'll be a casual day," he says.

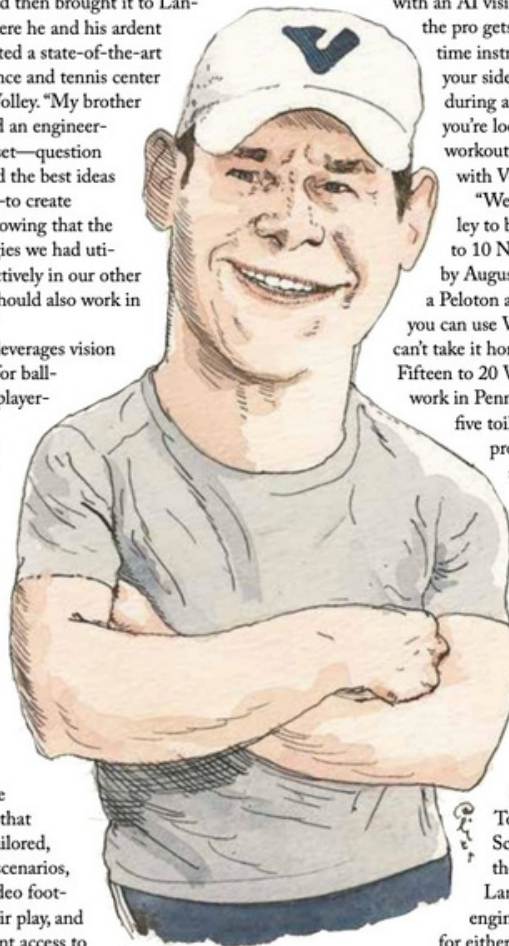
It'll also be a day to watch his daughters and reflect.

Some three years ago, Weinlader witnessed an indelible moment involving both.

"Emma held June for the first time," Weinlader, smiling softly, says.

Happy Father's Day, John.

For more information about Volley, visit onevolley.com. Volley's Instagram handle is [weareonevolley](https://www.instagram.com/weareonevolley).



John Weinlader

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