

## **INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-CLAUDE MASSIAS (FRANCE)**

### **Part 1**

**Q: To begin, could you provide me with a summary of your career in tennis?**

A: In fact, I started working for the French Tennis Federation in 1970 and have spent my entire career there. As a Regional Technical Consultant, I was responsible for the entire region of Paris and before that, I coached athletes for many years. But I truly started working for the federation in 1974. At the beginning, I was the coordinator for the tennis school, that is the training centres for kids who are playing tennis and going to school. And then, in 1977, we created the first national training centre which incorporated school and tennis and I was a coach there for approximately 10 years. I was in charge of French tennis players who were moving into the professional ranks. I coached a number of French players who went on to become France's top tennis players and then moved onto the ATP Tour. We then created a national training centre for the French Open where I became director for five years. At the end of five years, I then became responsible for training coaches and I worked there for five years where notably, I worked on renovating our programs and degrees. Then, in 1996, I was named National Technical Director so I was responsible for high performance, men and women as well as teaching children and coaches. I stayed in this position for nine years. Two years ago, I left this position and came back to teaching. Notably, I was teaching national coaches and in charge of all documentation, whether it was written or video.

**Q : Why do you believe that France has had such success in developing its coaches? Why are you able to develop high performance coaches who provide the country with good results in competition?**

A : It has been a long process. I would say that what differentiates us most from other federations and countries is that we have built a system where our federation is very involved and present. That is, we don't only count on the work that the clubs or academies do but we have hoped for a long time to build a high performance system where we first detect athletes and then train them so that France would be able to win major titles such as Davis Cup and Fed Cup. So, this work began in 1970 where we put together an entire strategy. Notably, we created regional training centres, national training centres and finished with the French Open training centre. Therefore, we did a lot of work on the training structure and likewise, we put in place a detection strategy to find the best talents and provide them with basic training. We have also worked closely with the clubs. We have also worked hard at training our coaches and it is a combination of these efforts that have allowed us to build a high performance system capable of producing great players. We have one player who was a World No.1 last year, Amélie Mauresmo and I would say that that was the result of, on the one hand, the work that was done at the national level but mostly, the work that Amélie Mauresmo put towards achieving that level. But, the major success of the federation has been to have more than ten players in the Top 100 on the ATP Tour and more than ten players in the Top 100 on the WTA Tour. And all of this is the result of long term work that has been done by the federation because when you have a great system such as this one, it does allow you to regularly produce top players and therefore, increase your presence at a number of events, whether it be junior, senior or on clay or hard court and achieve results. And all of that is the result of groundwork that was done at the federal level.

**Q : What have been the main objectives for your coaching program?**

A : In fact, you can't really talk about training coaches generally because for me, there are different categories of teachers. There are those who work at the fundamental level such as teaching mini-tennis who teach in clubs. We have to train them well because on the one hand, they provide motivation for the children to come into the sport and to stay but also club coaches at this level provide them with the basic skills of the game which will serve them well in later years. For this reason, they have to be both motivating for the students but also that they have the competencies to teach the fundamentals of the game. Next, there are what I call teacher/coaches qui take the kids that are already training but will work with them until they are 13, 14, 15 years old and that is where the most important work is done. You have to a teacher because these are people who are not professionals, they are kids who need to learn a lot of things on the technical, tactical and physical levels. Therefore it is a huge undertaking to ensure that these coaches are competent on all levels of the various components and not only at the technical level, they have to be competent on a variety of levels. After, there is what I call high-level coaches. These are people who train professionals that are currently part of the Tour or who are in the national training centres. They need to have an excellent understanding of high performance tennis and what it takes to get there. According to me, there are really 3 categories of teachers and coaches.

**Q : What are the biggest challenges of your coaching program?**

A : The challenge is to find passionate people, people who have real competencies in tennis and in teaching because passion is the basis of everything. We succeed when we are passionate. Therefore, we are trying to reinforce this motivation, this determination because it's something that is important. You have to have competence, you really have to understand the game because the game is always evolving. If we look at high performance tennis, as much on the men's side as the women's and when we see the ways in which the sport has evolved over the last 30 years, it shows that everything is constantly moving and you have to have coaches that are up to date on this evolution to ensure that they are always on the cutting edge of knowledge. And then, you need good teachers because communication, the ways to manage a group, to manage an environment so that the program can progress, so that the coach is also motivated, that he is eager for competition.

**Q : What is the key to becoming a good coach, for working with kids between 5 and 8 years old, from 9 to 12 years old, the various age categories for kids?**

A : When we are working with young children, you have to be at their level, that is, you have to use a simple vocabulary but mostly, you have to know how to keep them interested, amuse them, give them a taste of the game because it is an age where they come into the sport and if they have fun playing tennis, they are more likely to stay in the sport. On the other hand, if they are sad or lack enthusiasm and if we are too serious then tennis won't be fun and it is then that we risk them leaving the sport. That's the first category. Then, there are the club coaches who work with young children that are 8 or 9 years old and will follow them until the ages of 15 or 16 and this is a particularly critical period. That is where we build their game. After 18 years old, the player's game will evolve much less therefore this is a period in the life of a player where we have to be very rigorous because it is a learning period, notably

learning the technique of various shots. We also have to develop physical qualities therefore these coaches need to be motivated but really need to be good teachers because they have to transmit a lot of information, lots of messages therefore there must be good communication with the kids and have a sort of persuasive power in such a way that effectively, the messages are sent and the kids progress. You also have to have a very good understanding of the game, the tactics and techniques. After that, the coach, of course need to motivate his player but generally, at that level, kids are already motivated. On the other hand, you have to have a very good sense of communication to know how to help the player who is under enormous pressure from everyone, media, the public, etc. Therefore the coach must have a lot of experience in high performance tennis, a good understanding of high performance tennis because after, everything will depend on the details and it is there that you have to have a good eye, you have to decide in which areas the player can still progress and then give him the elements to progress.