

Interview with Fernando Segal - 2007

Biography:

- Former director of the Argentina Tennis Federation, who assisted in the production of such tennis stars as David Nalbandian, Guillermo Coria and Gisela Dulko.
- Has written nine tennis books dedicated to the technical phases of development and is a regular presenter at national and international conferences.
- Has also been a member of the ITF Marketing Group, the Educational Committee of the International Society of Medicine and SportNow works as a private coach and consultant to four different countries

Q: How did you get started in tennis?

A: I was born in Mar del Plata in Argentina and I started playing at a young age. When I was 16, I found that I preferred to coach instead of playing. My first coach was Felipe he also coached Guillermo Vilas one of our countries greatest players. Felipe changed the way we teach and learn tennis. He was a great mentor for me.

Q: You often refer to your coach as master, can you explain this?

A: In my language a master is like a father, he teaches you about life. It's more than just tennis, he teaches about winning, losing, how to express yourself, how to resolve conflicts... In my life, I have had many mentors but only one master. A mentor is like an uncle he can give you advice or help guide you to develop your career. I have had different mentors at different stages of my career. A good coach is mentor and over the years he may become a master.

Q: As a player what did you expect from your coach?

A: The coach must have a great work ethic; he must be professional, always on time, and prepared to work. He must also be a great communicator. A coach is a real pro regardless of how much money he makes. He has to create a safe environment for the player to practice so the player can be open. To be a coach it involves more than just teaching technique.

Q: What does it take to become a great coach?

A: I don't know if it's just one thing. I think to be great it takes years to develop yourself. You have to take lots of courses, read and watch a lot of tennis. After one year you are just a guy who knows something about tennis. After several years you learn how to adapt to players, how to motivate and inspire. Then you are a coach.

Q: Can a coach create a fighter?

A: The coach should be a fighter himself. I think every player has both a peaceful side and a fighting side inside of him. It's up to the coach to discover the fighter inside of the player. In Argentina, players and coaches often have to deal with economic pressure and basic needs, we have to be strong, we have to be fighters.

In Canada, so many of your hockey players are great fighters, if it's possible in hockey, why not in tennis? It is up to the coach to create the right environment that focuses around a dream and the desire to be a champion.

Canada has the talent; they have no less talent than any other country in the world. The coaches have to create a pathway to develop that talent.

Q: What do you look for in a young player?

A: I look in his eyes. Is he alert, always listening?

Q: What three things do you think all coaches should do?

A: 1- It is very important to be proactive, when players make mistakes you have to correct them in a positive way. You have to be a great communicator and continuously provide feedback.

2- Have a connection between body language and what you say. Players can see when you are not being honest.

3- Be responsible for what you say. Don't just say it for the sake of saying it. When you say something make sure it is true. People trust their coaches and that is a big responsibility. I have been coaching for 25 years and I still take courses, I still need to learn. I don't say anything unless I'm sure. I have so much respect for my players.

Q: What message do you have for Canada?

A: Be proud of your Nation. Be proud of your tennis system. The answers are here inside the country. Both the players and the coaches are all you need. It's great to look outside and learn from other countries and from people who have a lot of experience.