

## Interview with Jacques Hérisset

**Jacques Hérisset**, is Vice President, co-owner and Head Professional at Club Advantage in Quebec City. He is a Tennis Canada certified Level 3 coach who has been involved in tennis for over 35 years. At Club Advantage, he oversees a staff of eight full time professionals and is directly in charge of all adult tennis programs and event management for the club.

**Q: Jacques, can you tell us about your club and some of the operations that you are involved with?**

**A:** Club Advantage has 12 tennis courts and two badminton courts. It is my responsibility to fill up the courts to ensure the club is making the most from the tennis operations side. Currently we have over 3,200 members. There are approximately 2,200 tennis members and 1,000 Fitness / Badminton members actively involved at the club. Our fitness area occupies two of our previous tennis courts and allows us to service an additional client base. The principal owner of the Club Advantage is M. Serge Jacques, who is in charge the Indoor Clubs of Quebec.

**Q: Is tennis making a resurgence in Quebec?**

**A:** Although I can't speak for other clubs in Quebec, our club has been growing over the past five years. We have a very active membership involved in many different areas of the club. One of the areas that we needed to address at Club Advantage was the ever-changing demographics of our population. In doing so, we have been able to meet the needs of more clients and, as a result, improve upon the general health of the club.

**Q: How have you been able to address that area?**

**A:** The club had to make the switch towards that of multi-sport, as a consequence, we converted two of our indoor courts to fitness and now service an additional 600 members that we may have not done previously. Prior to that tennis was on the decline, so it was necessary to start new initiatives, effectively increasing the membership base. Now I can say to you today that I wish we had those two courts available to us as we could fill them with the programs or expand on the ones we currently offer. During the months of January through April, we convert one court to an indoor golfing range to meet the golf boom that seems to be occurring in the past few years.

**Q: It sounds to me that you have learned from the change in fitness trends over the past few years, how have you been able to still satisfy or accommodate the existing membership with all these changes?**

**A:** As Head professional and co-owner, you need to wear many hats. What might be good for the ambience of tennis may not necessarily be good for the club in general. Tennis is an aging sport and generally when you look at a club that focuses in that area alone, you will see a club that's not in good shape and by that I mean financially. As a result there have been many clubs in Quebec that have closed over the past few years, as they did not adjust to the changing needs of society. The membership has been receptive to these changes and willing to cooperate with any necessary inconveniences for the well being of the club.

**Q: As you mentioned you have been able to keep the Adult Tennis Programs section alive and thriving, how have you been able to accomplish this?**

**A:** What we have been able to do is build a league system that operates within the club. In the 1970s and 80s when tennis was very popular, about 80% of the general tennis membership organized themselves while the other 20% were what we call unorganized. Players generally arranged their own games, had block bookings or weekly games that supported the club without any assistance from the management.

**Q: How has this changed in the new millennium?**

**A:** Now the swing has gone completely the other way. Our facility now has 80% of members using a system that has games arranged for them using the ELO system, which we have been using for a number of years. The only thing the participants need to tell us is the times that they are unable to play and we go ahead and arrange potential games for the players. A point ranking system keeps track of the results from matches and players input the results to the computer. In this league, we have over 600 members participating and one of the main benefits is that players are not required to compete with or against any other clubs. The members have enough variety that they are able to stay at Club Advantage which, most importantly, brings in a lot of hours to the club and back to my responsibility of filling up those courts as much as possible.

**Q: Can you tell us about your junior program?**

**A:** Our junior program, run by Jacques Bordeleau, a Tennis Canada Level 4 coach, was the first sport program in Quebec to join the Sport Studies program in which many high performance players participate. Sport study was started 10 years ago and includes other sports such as hockey, skiing and soccer. Tennis was the first sport to be officially recognized by the Province of Quebec with this designation. It allows the juniors the opportunity to go to school in the morning and train from 2-5pm five days a week in order to maximize the training environment. The École de Tennis & Associates unites about 300 players, from 10-11-year-olds aspiring to be high level players to players who are already competing at the National level. The kids, as we say in Quebec, develop great autonomy and as a result, get excellent marks in school. The program allows the juniors to catch up on any material that may have been missed as a result of competition because in some sports, like skiing the athlete can be away for upwards of a month at competitions abroad. Fortunately in tennis, it is usually only a 4-5 day period that they may need to catch up on while away at National competitions.

**Q: What are some of the other successful programs you offer?**

**A:** In fact one of our strongest areas is the amount of weekend activity that we provide over the period of the indoor season. Traditionally over the course of a 39-week indoor season, we will have upwards of 30 major events taking place. Most clubs would have 10-15 events during an indoor period, but we really try to maximize the amount of weekend activity with events such as the Bell Challenge, Senior Provincials, four junior provincial and three regional events, in addition to various socials that we offer the membership.

**Q: What does the club do to ensure membership retention?**

**A:** This is one of the areas that we need to improve upon. We have tried some ideas in order to get potential members with some degree of success. We have computerized our system to be able to know more about the degree of participation of our members, and thus been able to react to their needs and desires of each and every member.

**Q: What are the most rewarding aspects in all of your tennis experiences?**

**A:** After leaving a smaller, four court facility where I was able to effectively establish positive relationships with members, I wanted to ensure that the club was built upon a family atmosphere. If the club provided an enjoyable place to bring the family and was based on that philosophy, the adults would feel comfortable staying for longer periods of time. With families busy today having both parents working and children involved in a variety of programs, the club needed to have programs that made sure everyone was involved. I feel that most of the membership have this feeling of belonging and being involved at our club which makes me feel that we were able to provide a second home to our membership and create the kind of atmosphere we were looking for.

**The TPA thanks Jacques for his valuable insight!**