

Interview with Jeff McCarrol

Jeff McCarrol is the General Manager at the Ontario Racquet Club (ORC) in Mississauga, Ontario, one of the most successful clubs in the country. Previous to that, Jeff was the Tennis Director at ORC. Jeff started his tennis career in Montreal in 1975 and honed his skills in Florida before coming back to Canada in 1981. Jeff has played an instrumental role in the development of the new Club Professional stream of education now offered by Tennis Canada.

Q: Jeff, why do you believe it is important for pros to attend this course?

A: Tennis Canada, in the past, has focused its coaching courses in high performance; however, 80% of the Club Pro's time is spent with recreational level adults and juniors in a club. The Club Pro's focus is completely different, he/she is focused on integrating members, determining their needs and wants, creating and designing programs and activities, and most importantly, establishing a customer service attitude. Let's not forget, we are in the tennis business and our business relies on our ability to attract and keep members in our clubs and the sport. The Club Pro 2 course addresses the business issues of running a successful tennis club from a global perspective.

Q: What specifically do you mean by that? What would be some of the benefits of attending this course?

A: Simply, the Club Pro 2 course will provide pros with the knowledge and tools of how to be a more valuable asset to the club, its members, and the sport of tennis. The kind of image they present, knowing why members join and quit clubs, creating, budgeting, and executing all forms of club programs for all levels of play, are just some of the key components and benefits. As competition with other sports, video games and computers, continues to grow for people's leisure time, it's very important our pros understand ways in which they can not only entice prospective members into the game but keep them as long term, satisfied members. That's what the course is all about.

Q: There are 13 pros currently employed at ORC. Are any of them taking the course?

A: Yes, two pros are enrolled in the first session being offered and it will become mandatory for all our pros to take this course by the end of next year.

Q: How is the course set up?

A: The course will run on two to three weekends, similar to the format that presently exists. The Club Pro 2 course includes about a 50/50 split between the on-court and off-court components and the Club Pro 3 course will be about 75% off-court.

Q: Jeff, you've gone from being a teaching pro to Tennis Director to Club Manager. What advice would you have for a young pro trying to follow a similar path?

A: Take the course! Creating a complete career path involves more than just on-court skills. Having a vision of yourself in the future is important in establishing what you need to get there. The course includes information on how to plan and build your career business...for instance, what are the

benefits/drawbacks of being an employee at a club versus being a contract pro? Should you be insured? These are all important topics that will help a pro with his/her long-term plan for his/her tennis career.

Q: What else does a pro need to have a successful career in tennis?

A: A pro needs to be versatile. A pro is so many different things rolled into one: an entrepreneur, a visionary, a business person, an administrator, a teacher, an organizer, a promoter... Pros need to modify not only their programs but they need to keep challenging themselves to find new ways to stay motivated.

Q: What do you look for when hiring pros? What skills and attributes do you consider important?

A: Extremely strong interpersonal skills are huge. Tennis is the business of customer service, the entertainment business. Pros need to be fun to be around, they need to be very animated and they need to care. I can help a pro with his/her on-court skills. That's easy. But if someone is dull and invisible, or they don't really care about what they're doing, that's something that's very hard to change.

Q: From a management perspective, what is the biggest challenge you have when it comes to your pros?

A: Coming up with new programs, especially during the non-prime time hours. We are always trying to think of ways to get our members who don't participate as much - by those I mean mostly juniors and seniors who are not as involved - to become more active tennis members.

Q: Who was your mentor? Who did you learn from the most?

A: I didn't really have one person that I learned from. As well as looking at what other successful tennis clubs were doing, I learned a lot from people in other fields and took what made them successful and transferred it to tennis. I learned a lot from administrators and from other personnel in the club business. I tried to be a 'sponge' and kept building on the knowledge that I had already.

We thank Jeff for his time and valuable insight.