

## Interview with Jon Sorbo - Part 1

**Q: How long have you been coaching tennis?**

**A:** I have been teaching since 1988 when I retired from the tour. I taught at two clubs during a five-year period, and have spent the last 7 years in high performance coaching.

**Q: How did you get your start teaching tennis?**

**A:** In 1988 after retiring from the tour, I went out to Palm Springs to visit my coach (Guy Fritz) and I ended up staying there. The weather was great and in about a month I took a job as a Head Pro in one of the clubs. I did that for 5 years and planned on staying in California, however Harry Fritz, (former Canadian National Champion), Guy's brother, was a Tennis Director of the Richmond Hill Country Club and asked me to come to Canada to help him for a couple of months. The whole time I was thinking that I was going to go back to Palm Springs for the season, however things turned in a different direction once I was here. As it turned out I met my future wife within a couple of weeks and couldn't go back.

**Q: Where did you grow up?**

**A:** In Bradenton, Florida home of Nick Bolletteri's Tennis Academy.

**Q: Was Guy Fritz in Florida?**

**A:** No, he coached me through 1988 when I was trying to make one of my come-backs. I got sick after my first year with chronic fatigue syndrome and to this day I still fight with it. As a result, I was not able to play a full competitive season. Leading up to this I was struggling with injuries and had decided to give it my last try in 1988 and was doing well when I had another relapse.

**Q: What club and program players were you involved with prior to Frank?**

**A:** In Palm Springs I was the Head Pro and taught adults exclusively. At the time I wasn't working with juniors. I was in my mid 20s and I thought that I was a little high strung to work with juniors. You need to be calm and more mature to deal with younger players so I ended up spending most of my time with the adult membership. When I came to help out Harry at Richmond Hill I started helping with the junior programs since I was now 30 and enjoyed working with the juniors. In 1994 I got out of tennis for several years to work in our family business. It was during this time that I met Frank and his family and was asked to coach him.

**Q: Speaking of Frank, how did it all start?**

**A:** Well it was interesting; a good friend of mine, Myron Grunberg introduced him to me. I used to play tennis with Myron while I was working for 3 years in the family business. At the time, I had stopped coaching and was playing tennis every morning for exercise. Then Myron came up to me and said "Jon I just saw the best kid that I've seen in 25 years in Canada". I said that I hear this every other week but he absolutely implored me to come out and watch this kid. So I said I would and on a Sunday afternoon Frank and his father came out and I hit with him. In the first rally we hit 200 balls without missing, I

mean 200 and he was barely 12 years old. I couldn't believe it, he was right; he was the best kid that I had seen in 25 years too

**Q: So did you start with Frank when he was 12?**

**A:** Well we agreed upon doing it when he was 12 but we actually started right after his 13th birthday.

**Q: Who has been instrumental in your development as a Coach?**

**A:** Well when I was on tour and trying to become a player, I video taped every match possible with this recorder my father bought me. I've studied thousands and thousands of hours of tapes of the best players, so that was a big part of my development as a coach. Having been a player at a world-class level helped a great deal. In the past few years having Myron as a friend has been very helpful as well. We exchange ideas and argue with each other and put a lot of different issues out there for discussion. I think it's good for coaches to get together and challenge one another to learn more about coaching.

**Q: Tell me about your experiences as a player?**

**A:** When I was in my first year in the 18s, I was 7th in Florida in singles and # 1 in doubles but I didn't have enough money to play a lot of the National events. I only played the U.S. clay courts and finished in the top 8. I chose to forego my final junior year and went to college where I played at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. During my third year in college we won a National championship and I played in the # 1 singles and doubles positions. After the Division 2 national championship where I finished the season # 2 in the country in singles and # 1 in doubles, I decided to forego my final year of college to turn professional. My first full year as a pro was in 1985. I played in 6 tournaments on the computer and by 1986, got to about 303 in the world. I played in Challengers and qualified for the Lipton which at the time was the richest tournament in the world. In April of 1986, one day I just couldn't play and was later diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. I was off the rest of 1986 for the most part, and played 2 tournaments when I started back in 1987. I played 2 satellites to try to get my ranking back and then got sick again. I started another comeback in 1988 and nearly won the Florida satellite and had another relapse. I decided at that time that it was just too much to handle. At the time I had beaten some good players; some of which were in the top 100.

**Q: What was your strongest attribute as a player?**

**A:** I was willing to hit a million balls to win a point, it didn't matter how long it took or how much I had to run I would do anything to win a point.

**Q: Do you think it is important to have a certain level of playing background to be a coach?**

**A:** To be a coach, not necessarily. To be a coach of a top level ATP tour player or a top international player, yes. One of my strengths I feel is that I can speak to a player in his own terms. I speak the same language because I have done the same things as they have done and I think that is a huge asset. If you haven't competed at that level, then it is tough. I think that you don't have to be number 1 in the world by any stretch but being a 3 - 4 hundred level player and having played some guys that were either on there way up to becoming big time players is very helpful. Having the experience playing some of the guys who were on the downside of their career has also been beneficial. By getting into the occasional

big tournament like I did, where you can play some of the top 100 guys are experiences that you can pass on to your player.

**Q: Do you think it is different in the women's game?**

**A:** I think a father can coach a daughter with no tennis experience at all. It is just that the depth of the women's game is much weaker, the tactics are much more basic due to their movement capabilities, and the physical fitness is generally at a much lower level than the men's game. So if a father is coaching his daughter, he might hire many good coaches to look at his daughter (like Mr. Williams did) and I think that can work. I don't think it is possible in the men's game.