

Interview with Peter Polansky

Peter has spent the last several years touring and playing on the International scene. He has competed in many top tournaments including his recent Wild Card entry into the Rogers' Cup Qualifying Draw in Montreal. We look forward to more great results from Peter as he trains hard to improve his world ranking.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your history in tennis.

A: I picked up a racquet when I was a couple of years old and just started hitting the ball against my house. I guess my parents put me into tennis when I was six, so I played a couple of times a week. Then I started to get into it more and more, and at eight or nine, I started taking lessons with Dean Coburn, my coach. Even then, I still wasn't playing as much as I am now, maybe only three times per week. At the age of twelve or thirteen I began playing 6 days a week.

Q: When did you realize you really liked tennis?

A: Well, I played hockey and tennis until I was twelve, and then I just made a decision. I felt I wasn't enjoying hockey as much as I used to, so I decided to stick with tennis. Even after hockey, I still wasn't really serious about tennis; I just had more free time, so I played more. As I got older, I started playing more seriously.

Q: How long have you been with your coach, Dean Coburn?

A: I've been with him since I was 8 or 9. That's when I started taking lessons with him.

Q: In a group setting?

A: There were five of us around the age of 9 at the All-Canadian Academy; we only met once or twice a week.

Q: So, in your opinion, what has been the key to your long term relationship with your coach? I mean, you have stuck with him for quite a while.

A: Well, one of the reasons is that he's always there for me. He does lots of things for me. He's always trying to help me improve everything in my game. He wants to help me reach my goal to become the best tennis player that I can be.

Q: He does a lot of things for your tennis game. What are some of the things he does for you outside of tennis?

A: He's always helping me everywhere. Like, if I need to be somewhere, then he'll drive me and if I need to do something, he'll be there for me. There are not too many coaches like that. No matter what I need, he'll always be there for me. On court and off court, Dean's always been helping me.

Q: So how has your relationship changed as you gotten older?

A: Well, I started being more serious when I was thirteen or fourteen around there. He gave me the space I needed as I got older getting older, I was allowed to do more things on my own. He trusted me and believed in all that I did.

Q: How is your on-court training different now?

A: Well, when I was younger, it was more just getting my strokes down, just technique and I was still learning how to hit the ball. Now, it's not so much working on technique and how to hit the ball, but just different (stroke) patterns and fitness. Fitness is a really big key to my training right now.

Q: How many weeks in a year do you travel?

A: About 20 to 25. I think next year, I'll be doing more.

Q: And some of the places you've been?

A: Mainly the States, like Florida and Oklahoma. This year, I was in Australia, Malaysia, Thailand, and I just got back from Italy and France and next week, I'm going to England.

Q: Wow. Do you get a chance to do any sightseeing?

A: Sometimes we do, but when I was in Italy, I wanted to go see a few places but I didn't have time since I was doing really well in the tournament (round of 16 in the Jr. French Open) and had to go home the next day.

Q: How many hours a week do you train with your coach?

A: With my coach, I do like ten hours or so, and then there's also group training and matches and fitness on top of that. But just with him, it's around ten hours. I usually hit an hour and a half or two hours with him in the morning, and on the weekends, we usually go practice for a few hours.

Q: What is an average day like for you?

A: Well, right now, I'm doing all my school through correspondence. So, usually when I wake up, I just do a bit of school work in the morning. I go train from around 8:30 or 9:00 until 11:00 or so. Then I come back home for lunch and little break, and do some more (school) work. In the afternoon, I would either have some group training or a match against some of the older guys from Canada. From 2:00 to 6:00, I do more training and fitness.

Q: Do you see any other professionals in regards to your training?

A: Right now I'm seeing a sports psychologist. Her name is Sue, and when I'm in town, I usually see her once or twice a week. I also see Martin Laurendeau. When I'm on Tennis Canada tours, he's the coach who's traveling with me.

Q: How important is the sport Psychology?

A: The focus is on keeping me relaxed and making sure I'm thinking the right things while I'm on court.

Q: How does your coaching on the road with Martin differ from what you do when you are home?

A: Well, with him, because I'm in tournaments, its more matches, matches, matches, and match preparation. When I come back home, it's just more training and working on different things between tournaments; trying to develop my game.

Q: In your fitness, what are you trying to improve?

A: Strength and speed are the two things I'm working on right now.

Q: This busy schedule must make it difficult to keep up with your school work. How do you do it?

A: Well, I don't really go to school anymore now. I have all my subjects to do on my own (through correspondence). And whenever I can, I squeeze some work in during the day. Usually, I have more time at night. I get home at around 7:00 or 7:30, so then I just do homework for a few hours. It's easier because when I was in school, I'd be away for a month at a time and then I'd come back for one or two weeks max and then leave again. I'd have to catch up on so much work in so little time that I was getting really tired. I was staying up really late and waking up early to do work. When my principal saw how tired I was; she said, "You can't do this next semester". Now, I do everything on my own. Whenever I'm done a course, I can schedule the exam for when I'm home.

Q: And how do you feel? Do you feel like you're still progressing with school? You're still getting a good education?

A: Yes. It's the same as when I was in school, except now I have to bring all my school resources with me on the road. It's a bit slower because I don't have that much time; however I do courses through the summer, to catch up.

Q: What are some of your highlights from the past year?

A: Well, last year,

- I won the Costa Rica Bowl.
- I got an ATP point last year on my 16th birthday, June 15.
- I was a hitting partner for Nicolas Kieffer and Roger Federer at last summer's Tennis Masters Canada.
- One match was a pre-quali for the Masters, and hopefully, this year I can get a wild card to get entered into it.
- I also won Under 16 Indoor Nationals,
- I won the indoor U18 Nationals this year
- The semis of B1 in Oklahoma were a big accomplishment
- In December, I made semis for singles in Orange Bowl and won the doubles
- Two weeks ago, I made the round of sixteen for the French Open after qualifying. That was good after beating some top juniors (Niels Desein currently ranked 5th on the ITF)

Q: In what way has your coach been influential in you achieving these goals?

A: Well, he won't let me get away with too much, like being lazy and not moving. I usually try not to be (lazy). He helps me get through the days were I'm sore from a hard training day. He also keeps me from developing bad habits.

Q: Is there a certain part of the game you and your coach are you trying to work?

A: Right now, tennis wise, it'd be my serve. Especially with grass courts coming up, I just want to really dominate with my serve. It's a lot now with fitness, too, becoming much faster and stronger on court.

Q: So how does your training change say, for instance, for November when there might not be a lot of competitions versus this time of the year when you would have a lot of competitions?

A: Well, when I'm in a period where I won't have too many tournaments, that's when I usually do lots of fitness, lots of training. As tournaments get closer, that's when I start to sharpen up on key things in the game.

Q: What qualities do you posses that have made you a great player?

A: I never give up. I'm always fighting; I try not to give too many free points to my opponents. I feel I have pretty good endurance on court, so I don't really get that tired I can go for long matches and still be in top form.

Q: What advice would you give to coaches with young players that show potential?

A: Maybe just let the kids enjoy the game more I see now, there're some parents that push their kids so much even at a young age. They want their kids to be superstars. They're not letting them have some fun. When I was ten, I was playing hockey more than I was playing tennis. I just played tennis for fun. I joined a club and there were a couple of kids playing and that was it!

Q: And what advice would you give to that young player?

A: Well, to never give up. I remember last year I was having a stretch of time when I wasn't playing that well. No matter how much fitness I was doing and how much I was trying to prepare for my tournament; I just couldn't get any wins. I felt after a while, if I keep doing everything right, then I will have to win eventually...and I did!