

## Interview with Rene Simpson - Part 1

**Rene Simpson** is presently the Fed Cup Captain and National touring coach. She was one of Canada's finest former women's touring professionals competing for 8 years on the WTA tour, achieving career ranking highs of #31 in doubles and #70 in singles and was a former Fed Cup player. She graduated from Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth, TX with a degree in Accounting in 1988. Rene discusses her career, the current women's game and what it's like travelling with players on the road. This is part one of two, next month we look in more detail at the organization and preparation that is required when touring with teams.

**Q: What are some of your career highlights?**

**A:** There are a few, the ones that stand out the most are winning the 1992 Canadian Nationals defeating Patricia Hy-Boulais in the finals and reaching the Quarter-Finals of the US Open in doubles with Sonya Jeyaseelan in the same year. Currently I am ranked #1 in the ITF Over 35 World rankings and have won the past two World ITF Over 35 tournaments and I still compete for the pure enjoyment of the game.

**Q: What are you most proud of from your playing career?**

**A:** The fact that I had a successful career with not a lot of talent is something that I am very proud of. I made the best of my ability and to have a career as a professional, reaching the rankings that I did, is something I can always look back on.

**Q: Can you tell us about your coaching career and how you became involved with Tennis Canada?**

**A:** After retiring, I started working with Sonya Jeyaseelan, although there was really never a formal professional agreement. By that I mean, there was never a contract in place comparable to what other coaches have with their players. At the time I was living in Toronto and so was Sonya so it started in an informal manner. It was a fairly easy transition since Sonya and I played doubles together and already had a friendship developed from our playing days. Then Tennis Canada asked me to travel with the World Youth Cup U16 team to Japan and eventually led to becoming involved with the 14 and 18 teams.

**Q: How long have you been Fed Cup Captain and how often do you travel with teams throughout the year?**

**A:** I will be starting my fourth year as Fed Cup captain and am looking forward to the challenges that lay ahead for our relatively young team this coming year. Usually I spend about 7-8 weeks dedicated to the team and a lot of that time is spent in maintaining relationships and following up on progress of the players at the events they play. As far as the juniors, I spend an additional 8 weeks travelling with teams throughout the year with more of a coaching involvement than with the Fed Cup teams. The younger players tend to have more tactical issues and we are constantly trying to address this area.

**Q: What is the biggest change you have seen in the Women's game since you played?**

**A:** I would say that the most significant change would be in the size of the girls, obviously today they are much bigger and stronger, not to say there are not smaller and more talented players like Justine Henine-Hardine, but in general the game is dominated by much bigger and stronger players from when I

played. The power game had started in the last few years when I played and has progressively become more developed compared to the players I competed with and against.

**Q: What do you feel is important in order to be successful when travelling with players and teams?**

**A:** I would say the single most important thing is that the player's feel that you believe in them and their ability. From my experience at team events, one of the areas that our players are missing is a strong sense of self-esteem and a belief in themselves that they are able to accomplish what they set out to do. In doubles, we have more of that; I'm sure that is more a result of our past performances and record of previous success in that area on both the women's and men's side. However, I'm not sure we have that same sort of confidence in singles. My feeling is that if you show confidence as a coach and the players feel like you portray that, it's more likely you can pass that on to the players. It is difficult to fake a sense of confidence, player's pick up on that and are less likely to succeed in competition.

**Q: What are some of your major tasks or responsibilities while travelling with the junior players?**

**A:** For myself I see my job as not that of a technical coach, but more in terms of helping the players perform to their best and use what they have been working on, based on the feedback from their personal coach or the player. I look to see whether they have shown improvements or still need attention in particular areas. Basically it can be broken down into three different areas. First, during the practice sessions, I spend a fair amount of time organizing their sessions and make sure they practice what is relevant. At the end of the day, I spend time with each player. If they were not quite sharp enough in a particular area, I spend some time to sharpen those areas to keep those things in check and not allow them to grow into even larger problems. Secondly, in regards to upcoming matches, we spend some time organizing their schedules; I prefer to get the players involved in booking their practice courts as it helps with initiative and organization on their part. Last, I like to get some feedback from the players on how soon before matches it is that they prefer to practice. Once the schedule comes out, I will have a meeting with the players to touch base on the day and make sure all the necessary arrangements for the next day are in place.

On tour with 4 or 5 players, it may not be realistic to schedule specific individual practice times, as often there are limited practice courts so we to travel as a group to ensure everyone is able to get in some hitting. One thing that I am very strict on is time and the players need to understand and expect that of me. When working with a group of players, it is necessary as a coach that time be respected and adhered to - as a coach you need to make a point to be on time for all scheduled appointments. As a player, I was not always on time so this has been an area where I have had to improve upon. The whole time issue is a reflection of you as a coach, it's difficult to demand that from your players if you are not effective in managing your own time.