

JTCC Junior Champions Program Parents Meeting

Wednesday, February 25th

Vesa Ponkka: This is a very exciting time for JTCC. We have been going through some significant changes that have positioned us for the best year of our history. We have added some of the top coaches in the game of tennis to our senior management team with Chuck Kriese coming on full time as our new Senior Director of Competition, and Pat Etcheberry and Vic Braden working with our coaches regularly as Senior Advisors to the program. Pat and Vic will be visiting regularly throughout the year and will be working with our coaching staff to add their expertise to our training program. Vic will be focusing primarily on the mental aspect of the game while Pat will oversee our entire fitness program. Chuck was the head coach at Clemson from 1975 – 2008. He finished his career there as the ACC's winningest coach in history with 11 conference championships and over 600 wins. During his career, Coach Kriese was honored as the ACC coach-of-the-year six times, and was twice honored as the USPTA National Coach of the Year. Since his retirement at Clemson, Chuck has been working as the Technical Director of the Southeast Asia Tennis Federation and oversees the coaching for them in nine Asian countries.

This is a very exciting time for the Junior Champs program in particular. As we evaluate our training structure, we have allocated more of our coaches and resources to the Junior Champs program as we emphasize focusing more on our youngest players. Part of this process has resulted in a promotion for Coach Ali, who will now be the Director of the Junior Champions for JTCC. Ali has established himself as one of the premier coaches in the United States for this age group, and the USTA has recognized this and is using his expertise in developing their coaching strategies and techniques. As a Director, Ali will now have his own staff reporting directly to him for all practices of the Junior Champs. Part of this staff will include JTCC's Senior Coaches and other Directors including both Frank and Vesa, who will all be reporting to Ali.

We are also restructuring our approach to the Junior Champs fitness. We are expanding fitness from 30 minutes at the beginning of practice to 45 minutes at the beginning of practice. We will also be adding a second coach so we can break the players into two groups for more individualized attention. The coach we will be adding will be one of the tennis coaches, who will drill the players through tennis specific footwork exercises to hone their footwork technique on the court. This is part of our overall goal to make every aspect of our training more tennis specific. Pat Etcheberry will be overseeing the entire fitness program and working with Ali to maximize the efficiency of these sessions. Pat is one of the premier fitness trainers in the world and has trained 90 Grand Slam Champions and 15 Gold Medalists.

Another change we have made is with regard to movement between the Junior Champions and Champions programs. Beginning next year, we will establish the Transitional Program to help players adjust to the jump between programs. This Transitional group will serve two purposes. First it will provide a gradual adjustment to the older, higher level group for the Junior Champs. The Transitional program will run for six months from January to June. From January to March, players will practice a minimum of two days a week with the Junior Champs, and one day with the Champs. From April to

June, this schedule will flip and they will practice two days with the Champs and one day with the Junior Champs. The other purpose of this program is to ease the financial burden of the transition on the parents. The cost difference between the Junior Champs and the Champs is quite significant, so this program will provide an adjustment period for parents to prepare for the final jump into the Champions program in September. At the end of the six month period, players will either move from the Junior Champions into the Champions, or they will transition to the Advanced Tournament Training program. We recognize that not all players develop at the same rate, and that is completely natural. Moving from Junior Champs into ATT does not mean that player is out of the Champions Program path for good, it just means that for their age and current technical ability, they are not ready for that group yet.

As far as financial aid is concerned, this year JTCC has given out over \$500,000 in need based financial aid. Next year we anticipate this number will be about the same. However, what is important to note from the standpoint of the Junior Champs is that since we are placing a stronger focus on this program, more of our financial aid resources will be allocated to the Junior Champs. It is our hope that none of our select players would be excluded from participating in this program for financial reasons. Watch for emails from William with details on the application process in the next few weeks.

As far as scheduling goes, we are looking at possibly adjusting the weeknight practice time for a few players going forward. While this idea is very much still in the planning stages, it would be good to get some Junior Champs exposure to the Champs practices from 4-6pm and 5-7pm. The details are still in the works, but we would consider dedicating one court during those practices to Junior Champs players. Look for more updates on that starting next fall.

One of the key aspects of our training philosophy at JTCC is following the proper path towards Long Term Athletic Development. This theory was developed by Istvan Balyi, a world renowned coaching educator, and has been tweaked and adjusted by our senior management to fit our program. The basic stages of development are as follows:

1. FUNdamentals

Objective: Build overall motor skills...speed, power, endurance, and technique are developed using FUN games. Appropriate and correct running, jumping, and throwing techniques are taught...participation in other sports is a must...ratio 1 to 3 between a specific sport to other sports is recommended.

2. Training to Learn

Objective: Build overall sports skills...this is the "window of accelerated adaptation" to motor coordination...if fundamental motor skill, technical, concentration/focusing skill training is not developed here, a significant window of opportunity has been lost...a 70% training to 30% competition ratio is recommended.

3. Training to Train

Objective: Build the aerobic base, build strength toward the end of the phase, and further develop and complete sport-specific technical skills...special emphasis is required for flexibility training due to the sudden growth of bones, tendons, ligaments, and muscles...during competitions, athletes play

to win and do their best, but the major focus of training is on learning and completing sports-specific technical and tactical skills...a 60% training to 40% competition ratio is recommended.

4. Training to Compete

Objective: Optimize fitness preparation, individual sport-specific skills as well as performance. High-intensity individual sport-specific training is provided to athletes year-round. This emphasis on individual preparation addresses each athlete's individual strengths and weaknesses. The training-to-competition ratio now changes to 40% training and 60% competition, and the 60% includes now competition and competition-specific training.

5. Training to Win

Objective: This is a final phase of athletic preparation. All of the athlete's physical, technical, tactical, mental, personal, and lifestyle capacities are now fully established and the focus of training has shifted to the maximization of performance...Athletes are trained to peak for major competitions. Training is characterized by high intensity and relatively high volume. Special emphasis is also required for training periodization and competition schedule design, in order to prevent physical and mental burnouts. Training to competition ratio is now 25% to 75%.

Our biggest focus through these stages is making sure that players are not advancing too quickly through these stages. The natural instinct is to progress too quickly through the first three stages and focus too much on training to compete or training to win. By not establishing strong habits and discipline in the early stages, you can dramatically hinder a player's ability to succeed at the top levels of the game. We are extremely careful that each player's training regiment is determined by the stage of development they are currently in, and are very meticulous in our decision making of when to transition from stage to stage. For example, in our program we have the three highest ranked American juniors in the world. Only two of these boys have progressed into the training to compete stage, and one of them remains in the training to train phase. Each player develops at their own rate, and we want to make sure that every layer of the foundation of their game is fully developed before moving on.

The goal of the JTCC always has been and remains to prepare players to become great college tennis players. This year, we have graduating players that will matriculate to the University of Virginia and Duke University, both highly competitive tennis schools with outstanding academics. So far, all of our students have moved on to Division I tennis schools or had tennis facilitate admission to highly competitive academic institutions that do not offer scholarships. An exceptional few have gone the route of professional tennis. By sticking with our training techniques and programs from the Junior Champs all the way through to the Champions program, you have every right to expect that your child will be no different than the JTCC graduates that have come before them.

One area that has been a problem for our program has been the court crunch during the winter months. For seven months of the year we are a 27 court club. For five months we are a 12 court club. There are several paths we are taking to address this issue. We are looking at ways to schedule court time more efficiently. We are looking at adjusting our programming scheduled during the toughest times from January through March when Maryland is using the facility. In the long run, we are looking at possibly expanding our indoor capacity by building a bubble over 4 or 6 courts during the winter. We understand that this has led to issues with our 4-1 player to coach ratio for some of the weekend clinics, especially

when UMD is competing. This is an issue we are working diligently to resolve through adding coaches and courts wherever possible. We have complete confidence that over the course of the program each and every player in the Junior Champs program will get more than ample training. Any deficiencies we have had to this point will be more than made up for going forward and through the summer training. We hope to have this problem resolved as soon as possible. Any feedback regarding this issue is welcomed and appreciated.

Ali Agnamba: As the Director of the Junior Champions, Ali will be taking a more active role in the administrative side of the program as well as the tennis training. Ali will be communicating more regularly with parents regarding training schedules and player development.

One issue that is very important for our players in the Junior Champs is having the proper equipment when they come to practice. It is critical to their technical development that they are using the proper size racquets with an appropriate grip size. Players who are using racquets which are too big for them are at a serious risk of developing bad habits with their strokes. The same is true of grips that are too big. We believe that every player in the Junior Champs program should have at least two identical racquets. It is very important that they are able to switch to the same racquet if they break a string or something happens to their primary one. This consistency between frames is very helpful for stroke development in the long run. Additionally, players should have a tennis bag, towel, jump rope, exercise band, and any other items they might need during the course of a practice. It is important to have them begin learning to fully prepare themselves prior to any practice or match.

As far as tournament play is concerned, we want to make sure that the players are not playing too many USTA tournaments. Players should not be competing in more than one or at most two tournaments per month. Playing the USTA events puts too much emphasis on winning and ranking which can be detrimental to the technical development we are working so hard to solidify with these players. Our goals are for the players to be highly competitive in the national rankings in the 16 & 18 and under divisions. Up until that point, we minimal emphasis on rankings in the 14's and even less on the 12's. A better alternative for players at this age is Junior Team Tennis. We are establishing a JTT league at TCCP and we highly recommend and encourage everyone to participate. This is an incredibly fun way for them to get some competitive match play in a fun, team environment. More information on JTT can be provided by Ali or Coach Ellen Miller.

Ali is very happy with the current direction of the program. Both the coaches and the kids have been working very hard and he is excited to continue this and further improve the program going forward. With the increased focus on the Junior Champs and the momentum that JTCC has right now, we expect the Junior Champs program to grow. As we grow, we will never get too big. The Champs program is at capacity, and we currently have a waiting list of players who would like to be accepted into the program. We are getting interest from players all over the east coast and we hope that as word of our program spreads we will be able to add more talented players to further push those already training with us. Our size is one of our definite strengths at JTCC and we will maintain this group at a number where the individual attention of each player in the program is not compromised.

Q: Will Senior Coaches rotate nights or just come on set nights?

A: We are working on the details of the scheduling for the Senior Coaches and other Directors to work with the Junior Champs, but ultimately this will be a decision that Ali will make based on what is best for the players. However, we do think it is important that every player in the program have the benefit of working with these coaches more often.

Q: Are the Senior Coaches going to be there to observe or to coach?

A: The Senior Coaches will be there to be doing hands on teaching. Our focus is 100% on teaching these kids. We hope to get to a point where Ali has the freedom to have his own court or rove through the practice and work with several different courts, but the Senior Coaches and Directors that will be part of his staff will be working directly with the Junior Champs players.

Q: What groups will Coach Kriese spend his time working with?

A: As our Senior Director of Competition, Coach Kriese will spend the majority of his time working with the players in the Champions program. His expertise on match play strategy, shot selection, and competitive routines will be best applied to our older, more advanced players. For the Junior Champs, we are still focusing on primarily fundamental stroke production and learning techniques.

Q: Will the Transitional program be the only way to get into the Champions program?

A: Movement from the Junior Champs into the Champs is completely done on a case by case basis. The decision to move up from the Junior Champs is a highly personalized one. That being said, we anticipate that all players will go through the Transitional program en route to entering the Champs.

Q: If the Junior Champs is growing and the Champs program is at capacity, how will this be managed when players are ready to move up?

A: While the Champs program is at capacity now, there is always some fluidity to the program. Through graduation, players travel schedules, and players leaving the program for various reasons, we don't anticipate any serious issues with this.

Q: What is Advanced Tournament Training?

A: ATT is the club version of the Champions program. Players in ATT are on the court and do fitness with the Champs and have the exact same tennis and fitness experience. The difference in the two programs lies in the off court involvement of the coaching staff. Unfortunately we are not able to offer the mentoring services to players in ATT or provide some of the other off court services that the Champs receive. Players who move from the Transitional program into ATT are not necessarily out of the Champs track on a permanent basis, we just feel like they are not where they need to be at that point in time to transition into the Champions program.